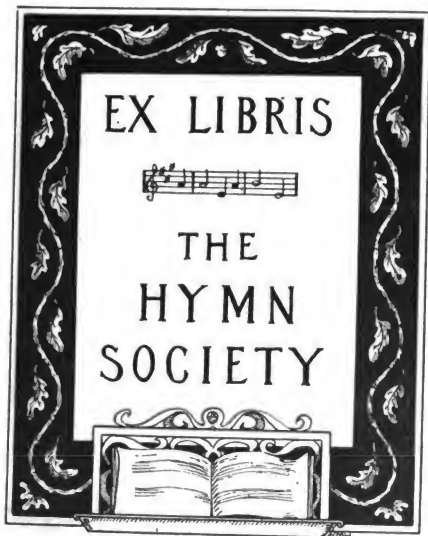




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"Well," she said in a high, strident voice, . . . "so
you've come, have you?"

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ELIZABETH CHENEY

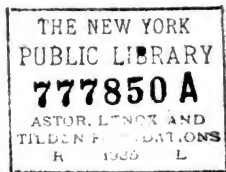
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ILLUSTRATIONS

"Well," she said in a high strident voice,
... "so you've come, have you?".. Frontispiece

A new world had opened to these two.....Facing page 297

THE HOUSE OF LOVE

I am bigger than anything that can happen to me. All these things—sorrow, misfortune, and suffering—are outside my door. I'm in the house, and I have the key.

—*Charles F. Lummis.*

CHAPTER I

UP THE HILL

"Go 'long *yerself*!" roared Silas Webb, the stage driver, with a slap of the greasy lines and an inoperative flap of the frayed whip. It is unnecessary to state that the horse had not said a word. He had only stopped for breath, as he had every day for the past fifteen years, at the widow Elkins's barnyard gate, and, as usual, he had turned his head to get a cornerwise look at his master. This motion Silas had always interpreted to be an intimation that he himself should get down and take a turn at the load. Hence his peculiar emphasis on the personal pronoun.

"Go 'long *yerself*!" he shouted again with another flourish of the invertebrate whip. Pepper Webb feared neither voice nor whip. The first belonged to a kind man, who never stinted the requisite supply of oats, and the second was an invaluable aid in fly-time to an abbreviated and sparsely furnished tail. Pepper was an elderly white horse covered with little reddish-brown spots which made him look as if he had been left out in the rain until he had rusted. He was a

very important factor in the freight and passenger traffic between Kent and Waverley Ridge, and had ideas of his own.

From the bustling riverside town of Kent, with its tall factory chimneys, commonplace streets, and mingled odors of smoke and machine oil, the road wound steeply uphill to the Corners, where it crossed another that connected the north farming district with the south. It then went on upward for another two miles until it reached the two great, gray boulders which formed a natural gateway to the lovely and aristocratic old village of Waverley Ridge.

At the Corners a straggling and unambitious little settlement had gathered slowly through the years about the big triangle of stubbly grass, inclosed by a rusty chain fence with whitewashed posts, and known as the Green. Here stood a couple of ancient elms, one of them scarred by lightning, and thrusting out a great charred, leafless stump of an arm that no one had ever had the enterprise to remove. Here also was the town pump, whose wooden sides served the purpose of a bulletin board and were clothed, as by a tattered multicolored garment that fluttered in the breeze, with notices of town meetings long held, farming implements "for sale" or long ago sold, farm hands wanted, and the inexorable demand of the tax collector. One of the old trees advised the

traveler to visit Ketcham Bros. in Kent for the best shoes. The other declared in stentorian tones of blue paint on a yellow board that the best shoes and the cheapest were to be had at "Owen's Oll-Rite Emporium" in the same town. Near by stood the old guidepost with stiff arms and black index fingers, the names and numerals worse for time and weather; and on the large stone at its base was the blood-chilling admonition, "Prepare to meet thy God!" This was a subtle theological suggestion that all roads lead to a final reckoning with the Unseen, and it is to be hoped that the statement encouraged the passing farmers to put the best apples at the bottom of the barrel and the gnarly ones on top.

Each of the four corners was occupied by a structure essential to the well-being of the place. On one stood the store, with its worn, shabby porch and steps, and a long shed with stalls in the rear. The store was after the famous old type with a marvelous variety of unsegregated wares. The mackerel barrel and the inevitable half-ripened bunch of bananas were near neighbors to percales and ribbons. Tinned soups, lozenges, pickles, and cough mixtures shared a shelf with stationery and highly colored soaps. The one short glass case contained adamantine chocolates, amazing sugar cubes of a brilliant rose color, the old-time striped wintergreen and lemon sticks.

cheap perfumes, a few boxes of cigars, and a tray of jewelry, whose tarnished splendors were seldom invaded by the hand of traffic. Small girls sent on imperative errands to the store by busy mothers were wont to loiter over the amethyst and topaz rings and brooches, pointing with grimy fingers on the glass and saying: "I choose that. What do you choose, s'posin' we could have 'em?"

Strange to relate, the post office was not in the store, and this fact was the sore point in the life of Ezra Hallett the storekeeper, who resented the right of Miss Annet Graves, Postmistress Hereditary, to unlock the attenuated mail sack that Silas Webb and Pepper carried daily back and forth between Kent and the Corners. But long before the store had been built, Annet's grandfather, Matthew Graves, had maintained a flourishing smithy on the northeast corner, and it had been convenient for the scattered farmers and their families to leave local messages in the wooden box on the window sill. Years after, when Matthew had died, and his son, Jeremiah, who was a carpenter, had sold out the business and had built for himself a large frame house on the southwest of the Green, this exchange of communication was transferred to a locked box on the maple tree at Jeremiah's gate, and the key thereof hung on a nail just inside of the front

door, any inconvenience to the family being amply repaid by a sense of great interest and importance. Jeremiah's wife died and left him with a little girl, Annet. He never married again, and when an increase of correspondence necessitated better facilities than the tree afforded, he turned the little square hall of his house into a post office. Could anything be more suitable for the purpose? The narrow spaces between the rails of the baluster made excellent boxes for letters, the stairs behind held newspapers, and the double front door, bolted as to the lower half, prevented intrusion from the public, who were permitted in warm weather to make themselves comfortable on the square front porch with its wooden settles built into the sides.

At this time people received their regular mail at Kent, but after a few years, as the population increased, Silas Webb became an authorized mail carrier between Kent and Waverley Ridge, and Jeremiah Graves the official recipient. After the establishment of a creamery in the region did away with the daily trips of the farmers to the Kent railroad station with milk for New York, the little post office became a center of interest. In winter or bad weather the men hung about the store until a red lantern set in one of the narrow side windows at the Graveses' door indicated that the mail was ready for distribution.

At the most there was but a handful of letters and post cards, and once a week the Kent "Herald." Nobody at the Corners took a daily paper. Those and the monthly magazines went in goodly numbers on up to Waverley Ridge. This front-hall post office had been a great source of annoyance to Jeremiah's elderly sister, who kept house for him, and who inwardly resented the use of the back stairs, steep and narrow, for the family. Annet grew up with the arrangement, accepted it as she did the old house itself, and after her father and her aunt had passed away, found the daily arrival and sorting of the mail a pleasant diversion in a lonely and somewhat monotonous life. She had a small window opening inward cut in the upper half of the front door, thus supplementing the light from the wide glass fan overhead, and relieving her in cold weather from the necessity of opening the door when handing out mail.

The remaining corner of the Green was occupied by a small schoolhouse, which served the community for various purposes aside from the education of the children. Religious services, social entertainments, lectures, and magic-lantern shows found a shelter under its roof.

Pepper Webb has now had ample time to recover his breath and resume his diagonal method of ascent, and as he splashes muddily onward and

upward, an occasion is furnished to describe the village of Waverley Ridge that lies at the far end of the route. Its history dates far back to the time when one Sir Percival Waverley received from the Crown a grant of the lovely plateau lying along the southern side of Mount Samoset, and sheltered by that rocky fir-clad summit. Here he built a Manor House of rough gray stone surrounded by wide lawns and gardens. As his large family grew to manhood and womanhood, new homes were built in the vicinity, none so grand as the old mansion, but spacious and attractive, whose wide, generous hearths and roaring fires when snows lay on the roof, were only a little less charming than the gardens of the summer with their wealth of hollyhocks, roses, and box. The third generation were much more numerous than the second, so that the artistic little stone church reared in memory of old Sir Percival and his wife was very comfortably filled by their own descendants. It bore the name of Saint Margaret's, for that was the name of the delicate, stately Lady Waverley, whose good works were as notable as her beauty and position.

There seemed to be so potent a fascination about the village that even the fourth generation did not scatter to the extent of leaving the family altars to the melancholy care of a few desolate

widows and spinsters. Many of the young people went to college, but it was a strange fact that, while a number of the girls married and went to distant cities, and even to other lands, Waverley Ridge to a great degree kept its sons. This is accounted for not so much by love of the soil as by reason of the stirring business activities of Kent. Its watches had found their way into the pockets of Alaskan miners and Chinese mandarins, its sewing machines hummed merrily in Bavarian villages and Indian bungalows, its cartridges sped their way in African jungles, and its lamps adorned library tables in New York, Saint Petersburg, and Rome. The boys of Waverley Ridge grew up with such wide business and professional opportunities right at hand—for Kent had to have physicians and lawyers, as well as bank officers and presidents of stock companies—that many of them returned from the university to settle for life under the roofs of their childhood. Some of them brought wives from afar, some married their earliest playmates, as not every Ridge family was of the Waverley stock. Many guests came and went. There was an exchange of civilities with a few families in Kent. Social life became brighter and livelier, but was always steadied by a choice conservatism.

The Manor House, which in the olden days had been the heart of the social and intellectual life

of the place, was now gloomy and deserted. The last of the direct line had been beautiful Anne Waverley, who had married a literary man, Dr. Thomas Allston. They had been happy beyond the ordinary lot of mortals, but she had died, and Dr. Allston had been left with his little son. He could not bear the echoing spaces of the old house, and returned to his native Boston. Twice a year he came back, conferred with the caretaker and his wife, and departed before night. During the long summer vacations he took the boy abroad.

On the lowering November afternoon on which our story opens, there was one passenger in the old stage, such a small, frail creature that the springs under the back seat did not indicate any weight. From the shadowy depths of the cavernous vehicle her white, wondering little face and gray eyes gleamed like those of a gentle hunted thing not equipped by nature with sharp means of defense, and despairing of escape. The hill was steep. The wide, worn cushions, whose buttons were either missing or hung from inch lengths of gray string, slipped back and forth with the child as Pepper went on describing hy-pothenuses in the mud of the road, and she had turned and grasped the back of the seat with her gloveless hands. At the far end of the conveyance over the driver's head she saw nothing but heavy gray clouds, and it seemed to her that the

road led right up into the sky. She wondered if there were a castle and a horrid giant at the top: Usually, the sky had made her think of heaven and her mother, but that was when it was blue and bright and friendly, with white, shining drifts of cloud. It had been that way every day for the two weeks since her mother went away. This sky was dark and forbidding, especially when seen through such a hideous tunnel of a carriage, and over the shoulders of such an odd and ugly-looking man. Still he had spoken kindly to her when he had lifted her from the station platform into the stage.

Silas had started to whistle his favorite tune, "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," which somehow especially appealed to his imagination, as his days had been spent entirely inland. Something evidently had interfered with his usual placidity of thought, for he stopped short, took his feet down from the dashboard, and drew his coarse, heavy hand across his eyes.

"Poor little critter!" he murmured under his breath, "wearin' a tag jest like a passel of truck." He turned half around and said, "Little gal?" An inarticulate sound came from the recesses of the rockaway. "Little gal," he repeated, "air ye all alone in the world?"

This time the sound resolved itself into an unmistakable sob.

"I vum!" said Silas. "Whoa there, Pepper!"

Now, in all his experience of fifteen years in the stage business, Pepper Webb had never been called upon to stop by the tree where a large sign advised the passer-by to use a certain well-known washing preparation. He had three stops of his own selection, and only three, on that route: one after the first steep pitch, another at the afore-said barnyard gate, and a third at a watering trough a mile beyond the Green.

"Whoa!" roared Silas again, pulling on the lines, but Pepper only twitched his right ear and trudged on without any other sign of attention. He evidently thought that his master had lost his senses, and it behooved the silent partner to keep up the credit of the establishment.

"Was there ever sech a thunderin', mule-headed, sot old hoss as him?" exclaimed Silas, half smiling. "He thinks he's a-runnin' this 'ere show, an' I guess he is."

Just then on a few feet of level ground they met Farmer Morris coming slowly with a load of feed, and as Mr. Morris stopped to make some inquiry of Silas, Pepper was mindful of his manners and stood still. Silas thus had an opportunity as the farmer passed on to clamber over a crate of indignant hens, the carpet-sweeper for the church sexton, and the United States mail, and step to the side of the stage. He had not an

attractive face, for it was weather-beaten and overgrown by a bushy sandy beard, and his eyebrows bristled ferociously, but his eyes were blue and childlike and had a twinkle in their depths. Doris, for that was her name, was busy drying a few tears on a morsel of cotton handkerchief, for she was a proud little maid and could not be seen crying.

"Now, sis," said Silas, cheerily, "I'm goin' to put some of the goods back here, an' take you along o' me on the front seat. Just step down now. I'll help you, an' then I'll git them pesky hens out'n the way, an' thet jug of gasoline. Come on, we ain't no time to lose, for Pepper he's likely to start, hens or no hens. He's got his own skedgool an' I hev to live up to it. There, *thet's* a lady!" and Doris was landed safely by an alder bush, and furnished with an old-fashioned musk lozenge, pink and powerful. Silas rearranged the cargo by a few well-directed movements, so that Doris was soon lifted to the front seat, but only just in time, for the wheels began to revolve, and Silas had to scramble to his own place and regain his breath at his leisure.

"This hoss," said he, "is spiled through and through. I believe if I should quit this mortal c'reer, he'd think he could go right on with the bizness."

He cast a sidelong glance at his passenger. She

was about ten years old, rather tall for her age, pale and slight. Her plentifully freckled face had a low, broad forehead, indistinct eyebrows, thin cheeks, making the cheekbones unpleasantly prominent, a well-chiseled nose that indicated force and dignity, a sensitive mouth, and a chin that showed no hint of weakness. Her eyes were red with weeping, and were fixed on the threatening clouds; but even if Silas could have seen them, he could not have described them to his wife that evening, for they varied in shade and expression with every phase of the child's thought and feeling. Sometimes they would contract and deaden, as if the soul withdrew behind a colorless and opaque curtain, and again they would flash and glow like living gems. Often they were hazel, again gray, and occasionally almost black. It was, altogether, a face full of possibilities of power and loveliness, as yet unharmonized, and considerably veiled by freckles. Her heavy reddish brown hair hung in one thick braid down her back, and was tied by a black ribbon that had done long service. The bunch of cheap daisies on her straw hat looked pitifully belated in the November grayness, and a light summer jacket did not prevent her from shivering as a sharp gust of wind laden with dead leaves swept across the stage. Silas managed to excavate a woolen lap robe from underneath the seat, and

awkwardly threw the coarse folds across the child's shoulders.

"O, thank you, sir," she said, and drew it closer.

"I see you're booked for Mis' Wilde's—know her?" Silas asked, significantly.

Doris shook her head. There was a reserve about her that put a restraint upon the kindly curiosity of her companion. A few snowflakes flew in their faces. The daylight was waning. Pepper's sturdy old legs plodded steadily up the hill. Silas meditated a more successful attack on the silence. Finally he said, "What's yer name, little gal?" He had read it on the tag that was fastened to her coat, but it was unfamiliar and had escaped his mind.

"Doris—Doris Avery," she replied, as if the words hurt her throat.

"Comin' here to live?"

Doris nodded.

"Been livin' to York?"

Doris clasped more tightly her small bundle covered with newspaper, and managed to say, "Yes, sir." Then, not wishing to appear ungracious, and with pauses for self-control, but hoping to have it over once for all, she said: "I had nobody but my mother. She went to heaven. Somebody wrote to a woman in the house with us to find out about a little girl to help, and she

sent word about me, and the people sent money for my ticket, and here I am."

Neither the man nor the child spoke again until the light of the store at the Corners came in sight in the gathering dusk. Silas had forgotten his favorite tune, being absorbed in a mental picture of the child's prospects in the Wilde house, and Doris was calling to mind what the dearest voice in all the world had said to her, "Remember, dear, that you are God's little girl."

She wrapped her bruised, lonely little soul in those tender words, and they helped her to bear the strangeness, the cold, the deathly homesickness that threatened to overwhelm her childish courage. The bare room in a city attic had contained a wealth of love that had interposed its tenderness and warmth between her and all pain and lack. It was that love that had been her home.

The snowflakes were falling more thickly as Pepper stopped at Miss Graves's front gate, but there was a group of men awaiting his arrival, and an array of teams hitched all about.

"Well, Silas," said a rough but not ill-natured voice, as the speaker stepped forward, "got any livestock for me?"

"There's a purty nice little gal here that's labeled fer your wife," replied Silas. "You'd best lift her out first thing, an' then I can git at the truck that belongs to this metropolis."

"Good-by, child," he said in a lower tone as Doris arose to meet Mr. Wilde's outstretched hand. "You've got friends in me and my wife up to the Ridge."

"Good-by and thank you," said Doris.

"And may the Lord hev marcy on her," he growled, unintelligibly, as he extricated the mail bag from under the seat.

"We're goin' to walk," said Thaddeus Wilde to Doris. "It ain't but a piece up the road."

CHAPTER II

THE ARRIVAL

THADDEUS WILDE strode along the narrow footpath beyond the store, beyond the few little story-and-a-half frame houses with picket fences, out on to the road that led to the region known as South Farms. It was then more than a quarter of a mile to their destination, and Doris, hurrying to keep up to her guide in the darkness, occasionally stumbled against a stone, and was ready to faint with fatigue and hunger when they reached the gate. There was no light from the front of the house, but the glass in a door in the wing showed a half-hearted illumination that shone out on the scurrying snowflakes and the leafless vines of the side porch. The man had hardly spoken since they left the Green, except to ejaculate a rough, "Look out, there!" when the child had nearly fallen. This was not his scheme. He could see no real need of another pair of hands in the house.

"There's your own youngun'," he had said to his wife when they had discussed the subject a week before. "Set her to work at the dishes."

"Thad Wilde," retorted Abigail, "I ain't goin' to have 'Relia brought up to be a drudge. Do you s'pose a pair of hands like them," holding up her own hardened and coarsened palms, "would look nice on her?"

"Anybody'd think that there's goin' to be a vacancy on the throne of England offered to Reely," he replied, "or maybe you're fittin' her for the White House."

"That wouldn't be strange," said his wife, seriously; "it's a free country."

"Well, you may think you're sowin' a fine crop of corn, but I'll lose my guess if it ain't pusley, an' plenty of it. Pusley don't need no encouragement, but you're settin' up nights an' breakin' your back to make the tarnal stuff grow."

"I've always said," declared the woman, hotly, "that your business is to 'tend to the outside. Inside matters belong to me. I want help, and I'm goin' to have it."

From her babyhood no one except her mother had ever called Abigail Lane anything but "Gale." There had always been a certain fierce, dominant energy about her. She had been born to a humble, patient, plodding little couple in Kent, whose personal appearance, like their lives, was done in monochrome of unaggressive brown. Nature had taxed neither her imagination nor her palette in their production. But the baby was a wonder,

as if some gorgeous tropical flower had suddenly blossomed among the prosaic rows of potatoes in the kitchen garden. She was a bit of incarnate flame, and had brilliant eyes, high coloring, and an imperious temper. Her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother had been upper servants in the Waverley Ridge Manor House. Perhaps it was the stories she had heard from childhood of the luxury and gayety that had prevailed there at weddings and family festivals that had first stimulated her girlish brain to aspire to ampler conditions than those in which she found herself. She hated the small, plain rooms, the dull comfort her parents took in the evening beside their kerosene lamp, the odor of machine oil that ever hovered about her father, and the long Sunday services when the minister seemed like a jailer, who kept her active young limbs in durance.

She began to ask why her father and mother should live in a tiny house when other people had large ones, why they could not keep horses and a carriage, why she had only two sets of hair-ribbons when some of the girls at school had different colors and wore them in lively rotation.

"Abigail," said her meek little mother, tried one day to the point of retaliation, "if you don't stop murmurin' against the Almighty, I wouldn't won-

der if the house took fire an' burned up what little you *hev* got!"

This was as surprising a flight of imagination for Martha Lane as if a tallow candle had exploded. Encouraged by the look of temporary amazement on the face of her daughter, she continued, "Haven't I told you that the Lord putteth down one an' setteth up another?"

"Then why doesn't he set us up?" questioned the unsubdued Abigail.

"Because it ain't best," retorted Mrs. Lane. "Now 'tend to your sums."

As Gale grew older her discontent was less outspoken, but she became sullen and remote in her manner. When she was about thirteen there was much interesting gossip all through that section about the marriage of Carrol Maltby, of the Ridge, to a girl from Ohio. It was reported that she came of a very humble family, but by her own native talents and force of character had made her way with honors through the public schools, won a college scholarship, achieved the chair of English literature in a famous college for women, and had made a place for herself as a magazine writer. The Maltbys had welcomed her to the very heart of the Ridge society. Gale had seen her when the bride first came to Kent to do some shopping with her husband's mother. According to the newsmongers, her father had

been a mill hand. Thus Gale grasped the idea that education would be the golden key to unlock the door of her dream castle. She did not submit to narrow, sordid, colorless circumstances. There was a way out. She no longer sulked and rebelled, but began to study early and late, and surprised her grammar-school teachers and led her classes.

Then her father had a long illness and died, leaving no money. Mrs. Lane sewed for the neighbors, and Gale went behind a counter in the village department store. Bitterly she saw her classmates pass on into the high school, and gradually become separated from her. She had no uplift of the heart heavenward. To her, God was a power who thwarted and tantalized her.

Thaddeus Wilde, a farmer from the Corners, had determined to win her from the first day that he saw her in the store. Her dark hair and eyes, her bright color, her air of executive ability were all very attractive to him. He had inherited a good house and a fruit and vegetable farm, and he felt that with a suitable helpmeet he could enlarge his holdings and supply a wider market. Gale treated him with a hauteur that amused and an indifference that stimulated him. He was awkward and ungainly and uneducated, but he had a mulish persistence that was more than a match for the girl's will. When Gale be-

came ill through worry and disappointment, and her splendid color and strength had fled for a season, and there was nothing coming in for rent and medicines, Thaddeus urged his suit anew. He had been most kind, coming day after day with fruit and eggs and cream. Gale did not love him, but she was pushed quite to the wall. To marry Thaddeus meant release from the bondage of the shop and an assured home to her mother.

At Deepfurrow Farm she rapidly regained her bloom and energy, but with them came the bitter realization that she had not had her own way, and never could have that on which she had set her heart. Her lot was cast. She was married to a comparatively poor man, whose only ambition was to raise the earliest and best berries and green vegetables in that part of the county. He was proud to have captured the handsome and high-spirited girl whom he had so doggedly pursued. He knew that she felt herself superior to him, that she did not love him, and the tender plant of sentiment that had taken root in his heart withered in the frost of her tolerance. He did not suffer much, for he was not trained to find his happiness in the finer phases of life and thought. His wife was practical and efficient. His house was neatly kept, his meals served on time, and dairy and poultry yard prospered in her care. She drove her duties before her fiercely

like a flock of sheep. Work, indeed, made an outlet for her pent-up rebellion at her fate.

When a baby girl was laid in her arms, all the tremendous forces of her nature were fused into one powerful passion. She would accept her destiny, her milkpans and chickens, with a degree of satisfaction, but her child should succeed. Her own life must be worked out on a low, common level, but the opportunity snatched from her should be returned tenfold to this new creature, whom she laid at the outset on the altar of Mammon with a fierce and unholy consecration.

Thaddeus had hovered over the baby with a new light on his heavy features, and a strange throbbing of the heart, but the mother had silently resented his claim to a share in the treasure of baby smiles and caresses, and had managed subtly to interpose her own personality as a barrier between father and child. While Thaddeus could not actually accuse her of such intent, he was aware of being left out in the cold, and accepted the situation with his usual oxlike acquiescence. Even the mother never lavished endearments upon Aurelia. From the first she placed her upon a pedestal as far too choice and too fine for ordinary use. She must be served from the beginning even as the future must always provide servitors. Others might wonder that so exquisite a child should belong to the Wildes, but Gale

knew that the little girl was the physical expression of her own intense longings. She looked not at all like either of her parents, except that she had inherited a delicate hint of her mother's vivid coloring, along with a replica of her mother's temper that lacked no tone of the original. She had wonderful, fluffy golden hair, and dark eyes that made an arresting combination with it. Her head sat proudly on her slender neck. That there had been transmitted a cruel selfishness, an inordinate vanity, and an obtuse moral sense did not at first enter Mrs. Wilde's thought. Neither did the first few years reveal that Thaddeus unconsciously had his innings, for Aurelia had inherited his intellectual fiber—a sort of mental asbestos that could never catch fire at a spark from heaven nor bring great things to pass.

It was too busy a household to be keenly unhappy. There was neither time nor ability to broodingly analyze the situation. Against the homely, bustling background the child blossomed all white and gold. Her mother had named her from a faint remembrance of an aureole. But the glory was on the surface only. When she was six years old she deliberately choked to death a puppy that had chewed one of her doll's ribbons. Her grandmother, as well as the father, had been set aside by the infatuated mother. Once when Mrs. Lane ventured to protest mildly

that Aurelia would be spoiled, Gale replied: "She's mine to do as I like with. She's no common child. I didn't get a chance myself, but she's going to make up for it."

When Thaddeus Wilde and Doris arrived at the house, the man stamped his feet vigorously on the mat and opened the door, shoving the child before him into a long, low-ceiled kitchen, where a large table covered with brown-figured oilcloth was set for supper. The room was blue with smoke from burnt fat. A slender, wrinkled, gray-haired woman was bending over a huge frying pan on the stove. A younger woman with hard black eyes and a flushed face was bringing from the pantry in one hand a plate piled with bread, and in the other a supply of butter.

"Well," she said in a high, strident voice, setting down the plates noisily on the table and turning toward the door, "so you've come, have you? Goodness, what a peaked-looking youngun'! See here, mar, what Jule Grannis has sent us."

The woman at the stove was already looking, her knife and fork poised in air, and there was a gentle expression in her faded eyes as she said under her breath the very words Silas Webb had uttered, "Poor little critter!"

A door opened out from the next room, and a child's golden head appeared. "Now, 'Relia," said Mrs. Wilde, "you shut that door this min-

ute! You'll get your hair all smellin' of smoke. Go back, I say!"

"But I want to see the new girl," whined 'Relia.

"You'll see enough of her, and I guess I shall too," replied her mother. "She ain't much to see, I can tell you that. Now mind!"

The door closed tardily, giving Aurelia a chance to pull a face at the stranger. Doris recoiled from the harshness of her new mistress, but realized that the room was warm and that there was hot food in preparation.

"Take off your things," said Mrs. Wilde, "and you can help carry in Miss 'Relia's supper. She don't sit out here along with us and the hands."

"But, Gale," timidly interposed her mother, turning from the large stone-china platter that she was heaping with fried corn-meal pudding in thick slices, "do let the child get warmed first, and give her something to eat."

"Now, mar," said Mrs. Wilde, "this girl is here to do as I say, and I'll thank everybody to leave her to me. She'll get her supper soon enough. The quicker she's broke into my ways the better. Come along!" she said to Doris.

Doris tremblingly followed her into the next room. It was a neat little sitting room. A base-burner stove and a hanging lamp with a flower-

bedecked shade revealed some comfortable chairs, an array of potted plants, a few lithographs on the walls, and other tokens of an attempt to make the place attractive. Aurelia sat at a side table sullenly picking at the strings of an autoharp. She stared at Doris and thrust out her tongue. Mrs. Wilde went straight to a tall, old-time mahogany sideboard with numberless drawers and doors and shelves, occupying nearly one whole side of the room.

"See here," she said to Doris, opening one of the doors, "this is where I keep my daughter's table linen. You can take this cloth and lay it on that little square table under the lamp, but first you must set off the vase."

Faint and trembling, and with a great choking lump in her throat, Doris did as she was bidden, while Aurelia continued to make faces at her and giggle insolently.

"Say, mar," exclaimed Aurelia, "it ain't straight."

"Well, I should say not," replied Mrs. Wilde, sharply. "Doris, don't you know enough to put that fold right along the middle of the table?"

Doris readjusted the snowy, little hemstitched cloth, and went over to Mrs. Wilde for further orders. From a narrow drawer Mrs. Wilde took out a sterling-silver knife and fork and two spoons. "Just lay these on the table," she said,

"and this napkin. My daughter don't use a ring. She has a clean napkin every day."

Doris started back to the table, but tripped over the edge of a mat, and fell headlong, scattering the silver over the carpet.

"She's spoilin' my things, she's spoilin' my things," screamed Aurelia, dancing up and down with rage. "I hate her!"

"I do hope I haven't hurt anything, Mrs. Wilde," said Doris, hoarsely, examining the silver.

"O, no, stupid," snapped her mistress, "it's the best thing in the world for silverware to slap it on to the floor once in awhile; keeps it from gettin' scratched up. Now see if you can smash this china and glass, will you?"

She had opened a corner cupboard that was devoted to Aurelia's belongings. Jellies, a jar of honey, tins of fancy biscuits, and a box of bonbons occupied one shelf, and on the other were several thin glasses and a few pieces of delicate and expensive china decorated in forget-me-nots. Doris was shivering now from head to foot. Her teeth chattered in nervous dread. She longed to dash out into the night anywhere, but controlled herself, kept back her tears, and finished her task under Mrs. Wilde's directions.

"'Relia has different things to eat from the rest of us," said her mother. "She don't eat fried

things. I'm awful careful of her complexion," and she handed Doris a tray she had set with the child's food—creamed chicken on toast, a glass of milk, and a golden slice of feathery sponge cake. Then as Doris returned she continued: "The hands have come in and we'll have our supper. You may sit with us to-night, seein' you've just come, but after this you'll have to wait on the table, and always answer 'Relia's call when she wants anything."

Doris took her place, knowing that six pairs of eyes were on her. No one spoke to her, for which she was thankful. The grandmother, next to whom she sat, supplied her plate and filled her glass with milk, and once a gentle, wrinkled hand patted her own when it lay in her lap beneath the table. From the next room came an impatient jingle. Mrs. Wilde said to Doris, "Hurry and see what she wants."

Doris awkwardly knocked over her chair as she rose hastily from the table and went to the household tyrant, who demanded more chicken.

"There ain't any more," called her mother through the open door; "you had enough and all there was."

"I don't care," shouted back Aurelia. "I didn't really want it. I wanted to make her get up!"

"How natural it does come to 'Relia to have somebody run at her bidding!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilde across the table to her husband. "She's got it in her."

Thaddeus grunted into the depths of his teacup and passed it up for more. The two stolid men at his right shoveled pudding with their knives and did not look up, but a slender, nervous-appearing boy of sixteen at the other side of the table flashed a glance of mingled amusement and contempt at his employer's wife from beneath his half-closed lids, that was not lost on that observant matron. Kelsey Starr had a way of making her feel at a disadvantage. Although he always spoke respectfully, he savored of adverse criticism. She had requested her husband to discharge him, but Thaddeus had found the boy so alert and capable and reliable that he refused to part with him. Mrs. Wilde stirred her tea and planned a punishment for that glance. She knew that the lad was devoted to books in the evening, and that he was studying with the Kent rector and preparing for college.

"Kelsey," she said as she left the table at the close of the meal, "I have to begin my mincemeat to-night, and you can stone the raisins and chop the citron."

"All right, ma'am," said the boy with a buoyancy that deprived Mrs. Wilde of nearly all her

pleasure in the announcement. "I must take a look at the colt before I settle down. He didn't eat right to-night."

Kelsey would have preferred to hoe an entire onion-bed than to seed one cup of raisins, and, besides, he had set his heart on mastering a certain Greek verb before going to rest that night. He lighted a lantern and went out to the stable, and then carried the light up to his room, and before Mrs. Wilde's voice rang up the stairway he had time to transfer to a strip of brown paper the six systems of the verb in question, and put it in his pocket. In the meantime Mrs. Wilde had set Doris to washing dishes. Mrs. Lane dried them and put them away, talking but little, and that in a timorous and suppressed manner. Mrs. Wilde had followed her husband into the sitting room, and had begun to read aloud to Aurelia.

"I want her to read to me," declared Aurelia pointing kitchenward.

"I don't think she can read good enough, dear," said Mrs. Wilde; "there ain't but three months difference in your ages."

Aurelia had acquired her alphabet somewhat later than the average child, with great difficulty and no ardor, and at this time could read only the simplest sentences.

"But wait till her work's done, and I'll call her," conceded Mrs. Wilde. "Mar needn't think she's

goin' to help every time, but to-night bein' the first, I won't say anything."

When the last saucepan had been scoured and put away, Doris longed to crawl into bed and go to sleep, but her mistress summoned her sharply, saying: "'Relia always gets read to before bed-time, and it's harder for me than scrubbin', because I'm dead tired out when it gets dark. Let's hear how you can get on with it."

Mrs. Wilde was anticipating the complete discomfiture of Doris, but the latter had read by the hour to her mother while she sewed. The books had come from a public library, had been well chosen and pleasantly talked over, and Doris had acquired a clear and agreeable enunciation and an acquaintance with some of the very best English literature. The volume that Mrs. Wilde handed to her was one of fairy tales and was no tax upon her ability, although Aurelia would have blundered sadly over its pages. Doris began to read promptly and with ease and charm in spite of her fatigue. Thaddeus lowered his paper to listen, while Aurelia's mother sat on the front edge of her chair, amazed and angry, a dark red flush spreading slowly over her face. The most difficult words glided without detention over the lips of the reader. Kelsey Starr had come down into the kitchen and now stood in the open doorway of the sitting room with one hand against

the frame listening, and Mrs. Wilde glanced up and saw him with that same expression of amused scorn in his narrow gray eyes.

"Stop!" she cried to Doris, who looked up, never imagining the jealousy in the heart of her mistress. "Where did you go to school?"

"I never have been to school."

"Then how can you read like that?" snapped Gale, recognizing the quality she neither could define nor acquire. "You read like a lady."

"My mother was a lady," replied Doris, gently.

"Well, you've read enough for to-night. Mar," turning to Grandma Lane, who had just come in, "just show this girl where she's got to sleep, while I put 'Relia to bed. And you," she ordered, turning on Kelsey, "had better get to work than to stand there foolin' away your time with what doesn't concern you. The raisins are in that yellow bowl on the buttery shelf, and the knife's in the table drawer. You won't need a wet rag if you use a cup of water for dippin' the knife."

Nearly all the influences of Abigail's small early education had disappeared from her life, and when she was hurried or excited she always dropped her final "g's" and lapsed into the vernacular of the region. "Come, 'Relia," she said, sharply, "ain't you ashamed of lettin' that little beggar girl be so much ahead of you? Somethin' has to be done right away."

Doris had never been accustomed to even comfortable surroundings, so she was well pleased with the large closet with one window under the sloping eaves, that opened out from the grandmother's room. There were a cot-bed with a heavy, dark calico "comfort," a wooden chair, a washstand with a small mirror that would have diverted Venus herself from all tendencies to vanity, and a few nails driven into the plastered wall. The window had a piece of cheesecloth tacked to the top for a curtain. The room was against the kitchen-chimney and so was moderately warm.

By this time Doris was so exhausted that she could have lain on the bare floor without a protest. She undressed hastily by the glimmer of Mrs. Lane's candle in the next room.

Mrs. Wilde appeared in the doorway. "Tomorrow we'll call you, being the first time, but after that you must be down by six o'clock every morning. If you listen, you'll hear one of the men shaking down the sitting-room stove. Are them all the clothes you've got? Now, remember, you haven't come here to loaf around."

Then she went away without saying good-night. Doris had taken her mother's little Bible from her bundle. They had always had a bedtime verse together, but there was no light by which to read. As she knelt to say her prayer, her mother's

word again came back to her, "Remember, dear, you are God's little girl."

Something had come between her consciousness and those sweet words—something dark and cold. It really seemed to her as if God were not caring, and the thought brought such a sense of absolute loneliness and despair that it impelled her to take refuge in the twenty-third psalm. She crept into bed and, weary though she was, began to repeat resolutely the familiar words under her breath. As she reached the last verse the words were all alight with a new, wonderful meaning. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." She had never thought much about that sentence. It had always suggested church to her, and she had been very sure that she would not want to stay always in the most beautiful church that ever was built. But now, she knew all through her that God is Love, and the "house of the Lord" must be the House of Love. Joseph lived in that house even in prison, and Daniel made his home there in the lions' den, and in this hard and cruel place she too could be sheltered in the House of Love. A gentle glow—warm, comforting, restful—diffused her entire frame, and she fell asleep as on her mother's arm.

CHAPTER III

THE STROKE OF THE LASH

It was Grandma Lane who awoke her the next morning from a dreamless sleep, and for a moment Doris could not remember what had happened the day before. She felt lame and strange and a little afraid there in the chill, gray dimness.

"I'm goin' down," said Mrs. Lane, "fer I allus make the coffee. Everybody in this house 'cept Reely has their own work to do. I let you lie as long's I could, knowing you was clean tuckered out."

"O, thank you," said Doris. "I'll be right along."

As she dressed she recalled the ordeal of the day before. It had been a thorny path, but the thorn that had pierced the deepest had been the new knowledge of her absolute physical ugliness. It had been brought to her attention for the first time. Her mother had never referred to her looks except in enforcing lessons of personal neatness, and since her death no one had spoken of the subject until Mrs. Wilde's unfeeling remarks and Aurelia's radiant hair and skin had brought out

the fact of (as she thought) her own unloveliness. She caught up the candle and took a hasty glance into the cheap, rippling mirror, which distorted her features into elfin grotesqueness.

"How can anybody love me?" she queried, sadly, then hurried with fast-beating heart down the narrow back stairway to the kitchen.

"O, here you are, are you?" said Mrs. Wilde, setting down a dish of cold boiled potatoes and looking darkly at the kitchen clock. Thaddeus was just slamming the back door and muttering sullenly. Mrs. Wilde proceeded irritably: "'Relia has her breakfast in bed these cold mornings, and you can carry it up when I get it ready. But first set the big table, and chop these potatoes, and then later go in the sitting room, and tidy it up from last night. Pull up the shades, pick up the books and papers, brush up the ashes that the man spilled when he took 'em up, wash the zinc, dust everything, and be quick about it!"

A little later, when Doris drew up the shades, she saw for the first time in her life the unsullied glory of a country morning after a heavy snow-storm. She caught her breath at the wonder of it. There was no house in sight, and fields and fences, woods and hills, were softly white and beginning to gleam in the first rays of the sun.

She stood transfixed and awed before the great pure silence of the landscape.

"There you be!" said Mrs. Wilde, glancing in at the door. "I knew you wouldn't work unless you were watched every minute."

"O," said Doris, flushing hotly, "please, I never saw anything like this before. I couldn't help looking at it."

Kelsey Starr had come in to warm some chicken feed on the big stove in the kitchen. He had noticed the face of Doris just before Mrs. Wilde spoke to her, and there was a light on it that startled him. An hour or two later, when he was sawing wood in the lean-to adjoining the kitchen, Doris, who had been sent out there after the scrubbing-pail and brush, saw him with a piece of writing paper pinned up on a beam beside him.

"I'm glad you like the snow," he said hurriedly. "I'm learning what one of our greatest men said about it. Want to hear it?"

"I'm afraid I mustn't stop," said Doris, nervously, looking toward the door. "I'm 'most afraid to breathe."

"I heard her go upstairs just now," said Kelsey; "listen!"

Then he recited Emerson's superb lines.

"O, isn't that splendid!" said Doris with eyes aglow. "I don't quite understand it all, but I would love to learn it."

"Well, you may," said Kelsey, cordially taking down the paper. "I'll give you a pencil and a

little blankbook and you can copy it, and give this paper back to me. Write all the new words in the back of the book, and learn to spell them. You can say them over and over while you are working—and it keeps one from getting blue in this blasted place.”

Doris hurried back into the kitchen just before Mrs. Wilde clattered down the stairs. 'Relia's tray had been already set without a mishap, and soon it was ready to be carried up to the southwest chamber, where she sat up in bed like a young princess, with a dainty blue shawl around her shoulders. To Doris, who had breakfasted with the family on hash, and had felt grateful for enough of it, 'Relia's dainty repast was a picture, with its delicately poached egg, light-brown buttered toast, and cup of cocoa with whipped cream. Aurelia gave one glance at the tray. "Take it away!" she cried. "There isn't anything I like!"

"But—" interposed Doris.

"Take it away this minute!" screamed Aurelia, turning the plate of toast upside down on the tray, and thereby hitting the cocoa so that it spilled over onto the pretty cloth. "Tell my mother I want an omelet, bananas and cream, hot muffins and coffee."

Doris made her way down to the kitchen with the despised breakfast. Mrs. Wilde stood molding bread for the last rising.

"She sent it back," said Doris, setting down the tray.

"Can't you carry anything upstairs without upsettin' an' sloppin'?" said Mrs. Wilde. "Of course the child couldn't eat any such looking mess as that. She's very particular."

"It looked very nice," replied Doris, "when 'Relia first saw it."

"Miss Aurelia," corrected Mrs. Wilde, loftily; "servants should be respectful to their superiors."

Just then Aurelia's voice was heard through the hole in the sitting-room ceiling that admitted warm air to her bedroom. She demanded breakfast.

"She wants something different," said Doris, repeating the items that Aurelia had specified.

"Well," said Mrs. Wilde, "since you spoiled her breakfast, and I have to do it over again, I might as well make one thing as another, only she can't have muffins at this time in the morning. As for you, Doris Avery, you will have no dessert this noon."

In less than half an hour the tray went again upstairs. Aurelia grumbled over the lack of muffins, but made Doris sit down on the bed while she ate.

"I wonder how many freckles you have," she said. "Let's both guess, an' then count 'em, an' the one that's nearest right will get something."

If it's me, you can give me that little blue ring on your finger, an' if it's you, I'll give you one of the candies out of my box, not a pink one nor a chocolate, but a little white one."

"Doris!" called Mrs. Wilde from below, like an irate foghorn.

"Don't you go," said Aurelia. "She got you for me and I want you."

But Doris ran downstairs, glad to escape the torture of Aurelia's cruel eyes and tongue.

"Hurry and peel these apples for my pies," said Mrs. Wilde.

Doris had stopped for a second in the frosty front hall, and had taken one quick look at the first line of the poem. "Announced by all the trumpets of the sky." As she peeled the apples she said the words over and over instead of brooding over her hardships. The lines put her in touch with the great, radiant harmony outside.

"Now," said Mrs. Wilde, when the last apple was sliced, "it's high time that my daughter got up. The sitting room's as warm as toast. I'll get Kelsey Starr to bring down the dolls' house, and she'll have enough to amuse her until dark. Now go and dress her. Put on the garnet cashmere—I've laid it out on the chair—and the hair-ribbons to match. Mar, just you wash them potatoes."

Doris returned to Aurelia with a sinking heart.

That young person did not wish to wear the garnet cashmere, but a light blue one, and sent Doris down with the information. "I don't know why you should want to set that child against the red dress," said Mrs. Wilde. "You needn't expect to get it for yourself. You'd look like a fright in it. Tell 'Relia to put it on or stay in bed with no dinner."

On the way back Doris met Kelsey in the sitting room, carefully setting down the dolls' house. She paused involuntarily, and her heart leaped. She had seen such at Christmastide in the city shop-windows, but none so large and complete as this. The rooms were daintily papered, and the windows, real glass windows, veiled by lace curtains. There was a parlor in light blue, with exquisite china chairs, a sofa, and an upright piano. There were a bedroom in pink, a dining room in green, and a kitchen with stove and shelves and rows of shining tins. There was a hall with stairs and a cushioned seat. There were framed pictures on the walls, a clock in the dining room, and a gilt birdcage hanging from a hook. There were a gentleman and a lady in the parlor, and a lovely little baby in a white crib in the nursery. Doris stood staring at the marvel with wide, glistening eyes. O, to be able to touch those beautiful things! Kelsey rose, straightened himself, and saw the look.

"Pretty nice, isn't it?" he said in a low tone; "too nice for that little fiend upstairs."

Doris could not speak.

"Here's the book and pencil I promised you," went on Kelsey, pulling a little blankbook out of his pocket and a nicely sharpened red lead pencil.

"Thank you so much," said Doris, brightening. "I learned the first line peeling apples, and I can spell 'announced' too."

She rushed up to her own room and hid the book in the washstand drawer, sighing at the glimpse of her face in the old glass, and then carried Mrs. Wilde's message to Aurelia, while she wondered with quickening heartbeats if she would ever play with that wonderful dolls' house.

"Come," she said, cheerfully, "your mother says you must wear the red dress. I think it's a beauty on this snowy day. It is as pleasant as a fire."

"Well, I won't wear it," declared Aurelia; "I want the blue one."

"But your mother said that you must either wear the red one or stay in bed and have no dinner."

"What is there for dinner?"

"Corned beef and cabbage and potatoes and apple pie," replied Doris. "I saw your mother baking a dear little turnover too."

"I love hot apple turnovers," meditated Aurelia,

"but I won't wear the red dress. Bring it to me."

Doris took the soft, pretty cashmere to the bed. Aurelia lighted a candle that stood on a stand near by, and when it began to melt, blew it out, and rubbed the hot tallow up and down the front breadth of the skirt until it was decorated with an array of grease spots.

"Go tell mother I can't wear the dress," said Aurelia. "It ain't fit to be seen; and if you tell her what I did, you'll be sorry, Freckle Face!" Doris went again downstairs. Her eyes were full of tears. "I think you had better go up," she said. "She doesn't want to wear the red dress."

"Goodness sakes alive!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilde, who was finding the rearing of an aristocrat a wearing process. But she went up to Aurelia, who said that something had happened to her dress and she could not wear it. It was not neat, and she knew that her mother wished her always to be neat. Mrs. Wilde surveyed the grease spots, touched them, and smelled of them with a puzzled air.

"Aurelia Wilde," said she, "this is fresh grease! How did it come there?"

"I don't want to tattle on Doris, mother, but she said she wanted to light the candle, it is such fun to see the drops run down the sides, and I knew you wouldn't want her to waste it, and told

her so, but she would light it. The dress lay right here on the bed, and I tried to get the candle away from her and it dripped. I didn't want to tell on her though."

Mrs. Wilde was white with anger. She went to the closet, took down the blue cashmere and threw it across the footboard, then hurried to the head of the kitchen stairs. "Doris Avery!" she shouted, hoarsely.

Doris opened the door at the foot of the narrow flight. "Get that horsewhip in the corner behind the wood-box and come right up here to me!"

Doris, innocent of any wrongdoing, turned to get the whip. Kelsey Starr was filling the wood-box as she took it from its place. He had heard the wrath in Mrs. Wilde's voice, and as Doris left the room he said to Grandma Lane, who was setting the dinner table, "Do you suppose Doris is going to get a whipping?"

"Lor', no," replied Grandma; "she ain't done nothin'. A real peaceable, quiet little thing."

But Kelsey went to the foot of the stairs and listened. He heard Mrs. Wilde's voice raised in anger, then a murmur of piteous surprise from Doris, and after a moment's silence, the swift cut of the lash, and one smothered heartrending cry. Kelsey rushed upstairs three steps at a time. His face was as white as Mrs. Wilde's and his eyes were wide open and blazing as he bounded into

Aurelia's room. Doris had gone down on her knees, her face buried in her hands, and across her thin little shoulders was a cruel, bright red streak. Aurelia sat in the bed with fiendish glee on her features.

"Stop!" cried Kelsey, seizing the whip from Mrs. Wilde's upraised hand.

"How dare you?" she ejaculated.

"How dare you?" he questioned, fiercely.

Much as Mrs. Wilde disliked Kelsey, she was afraid of him. The editor of the Kent weekly was an old friend of his dead father, and the Episcopal rector was his Latin teacher.

"You'd best mind your own business," she said, savagely.

"So I am doing," he replied, withdrawing with the whip from the room.

Doris rose trembling to her feet. "Mrs. Wilde," she said, simply, "I told you the truth. I did not touch the candle nor soil the dress."

"She did, she did, she did!" shouted Aurelia. "Freckle Face, Freckle Face, homeliest girl in all the place!"

Doris was fastening her dress as best she could. Her shoulders smarted keenly.

"I'd send you to bed," said Mrs. Wilde, "but it would be too easy and comfortable. Help 'Relia with her clothes and button her shoes. You can have nothing but bread for dinner, and

after you've done all the dishes and scoured the knives and tins, scalded the dish-towels, blacked the stove, and wiped up the oilcloth, you can try to get the grease out of that dress with benzine."

Then she went downstairs.

"O, 'Relia——"

"Miss Aurelia," said that lovable person, drawing herself up haughtily. But Doris ignored the correction. "How could you tell such a story?"

"I wanted to wear the blue dress and I'm goin' to! I hate you, little beggar girl!"

A black wave of resentment swept through the soul of Doris that frightened her at herself. No such feeling had ever found its way into her consciousness. "Whatever she says or does," thought she, "I mustn't hate back if I live in the House of Love. It isn't Mrs. Wilde's house, it's the Lord's house, and if I hate I cannot belong to it. I cannot even stay on the piazza."

All that weary afternoon as Doris, deprived of the savory dinner, washed and scrubbed and toiled alone, Grandma Lane having been set at darning stockings, she was wrestling with a sense of anger and bitterness. "It's the Lord's house, but I'm not in it," she was saying to herself. "I'm 'way down by the front gate, 'most outside the fence, I'm afraid, for I don't love Mrs. Wilde or 'Relia one bit. I'd like to run away, but I can't, for the snow is so deep, and it is so far to Kent, and no-

body knows me there. Nobody knows me anywhere or cares at all."

Her tears dropped into the scrub-pail. "I never had such dreadful feelings in my heart before. It's worse than the whip. I'd like 'Relia to have smallpox and spoil her pink skin, and for Mrs. Wilde to break her leg and lose every bit of hair on her head, so it would be all bald and shiny, and make them both eat nothing but potato peelings for days and days. O, Lord, I'm too wicked to speak to you ever any more. I sort of like to hate, hate, hate them both."

She plied her brush with an energy that threatened the pattern of the oilcloth. Then an inner Voice made itself heard amid the tumult, like a song without words, as if Some One offered to help her. "Dear Lord," she whispered, "please take this horrid black hate out of my heart. I don't want it. I don't want it, truly I don't."

Then she was conscious of the same gentle, comforting glow that she had experienced the night before, as if she were drawn against a great, warm heart and held close. "God's little girl." She could hear her mother's soft tone. She knew she must forgive, she wanted to forgive, and in a little while the darkness had vanished.

"I forgive Mrs. Wilde and Aurelia," she said under her breath, with a deep sense of relief and peace.

Just then Mrs. Wilde came into the kitchen. Some strange influence must have touched her heart, perhaps the sight of the little orphan so utterly alone and in her power, bending to the hard task and doing it so well, for she said to her own surprise, coldly, but not tartly: "You may go into the pantry now and get yourself a glass of milk and a piece of pie. There's just one piece left."

That night when the long, wearisome day was done and she had crept into her cot-bed, Doris heard Grandma Lane come softly into the bare little room, and felt her sit down on the edge of the bed in the dark.

"Child," she said, "did 'Reely spoil her dress herself?"

"Please, Mrs. Lane, don't make me tell," said Doris.

"Doris," said the wavering old voice, "'Reely ain't much comfort to me. Will you be my little grandchild, an' call me 'Gran'ma' when there ain't nobody around, and love me just a little? I do want a little love!"

Doris raised herself from the pillow and put both arms around the old lady's neck and kissed her cheek. "I never had a grandma," she said, "and I'm so glad to adopt you."

So Grandma Lane tucked her in and kissed her good night, and Doris lay awake quite awhile, for

the kind, gentle touch and the kiss brought vividly before her the bare room in the distant city, and a face thin and white, but very beautiful, brought into relief by the heap of dull blue material in the lap, against which the gold of the wedding ring gleamed as a pair of delicate, ever busy hands plied a needle from morning until night. Doris hated the needle and the blue stuff that kept her so often from the arms where she would have loved to nestle, but the mother would smile and say, "Bread and fire and bed, my darling. Now, whom shall we have to afternoon tea?"

Doris often chose Joan of Arc, because it was so interesting to peer down into the street for the first white horse that would come along. Joan would hardly have recognized her snowy charger in the dingy nag harnessed to some ashcart or vender's wagon. But when Joan had climbed the stairs and knocked at the door, and Doris had opened it in the very best style, then the mother would turn into Joan, and tell about the dear, dreamy old garden in Domremy, and the Voices, the boy prince, the terrible war, and the banner with the lilies. When they were quite sure that Queen Elizabeth would not come they would ask Mary Stuart. Doris liked her best of all, with her pretty hair and velvet gown and pearls. Doris's mother had once been in Edinburgh, and knew the old castle on the hill, and fascinating

Holyrood too, with its stone floors, secret stairs, and ruined chapel. Doris recalled the sunsets that they saw together far away over the roofs of the houses, beyond the river and the range of hills. The view made a large room of their little one. The gold of her mother's hair, the gray of her deep eyes, the sound of her voice all came back so vividly to Doris that again the smothering, despairing, desolating ache that was like an iron hand at her heart came with them. Again she took refuge in the Shepherd Psalm, and knew that the House of Love held both her mother and herself. They were together still.

"She is just upstairs," said Doris to herself. "It's the very same house—the very same house," and she fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

MISS TURNER'S METHOD

DORIS did not have to be called the next morning. She was awake before the sitting-room fire was shaken down, and lay there in the dusk wondering and thinking. Grandma Lane was snoring gently. Doris was warm and comfortable, and it was good to be awake and to know how quiet and cozy it was up there away from Mrs. Wilde and Aurelia. She wished there was something she could do for Kelsey Starr to show how much she appreciated his championship. "I guess his great-great-greater-greatest grandfather must have sat at King Arthur's Round Table, or else perhaps he's some relation to Abraham Lincoln. I'll ask him."

Doris's wildest imaginings could not conceive a greater compliment, for to her patriotic, fervent, worshipful little soul one tall, gaunt, deep-eyed figure towered above every human being that had ever lived. Her mother had told the story well, and Julius Cæsar and Napoleon the First must ever hang their diminished heads before our martyred Great Heart.

"If I can only remember," she said to herself, "that this isn't Mrs. Wilde's house where I live! It is God's house, and only kind people live in it. I wouldn't think God would want such a very homely girl as I am in his lovely house. Now I know why mother used to tell me that everybody can have a perfectly beautiful spirit, and it is the spirit that God sees and knows. There goes the stove-shaker!" and Doris was up as at a trumpet call, and downstairs before Grandma was awake, or Mrs. Wilde herself had appeared on the scene. A kerosene hand-lamp was burning sullenly on the kitchen table, and Thaddeus sat by the stove drawing on a pair of heavy boots. He resented the presence of Doris in the house, but he had been a kind-hearted man before Abigail Lane had repressed and suppressed all the gentler traits of his nature.

"Well, little girl," he said gruffly but not unkindly, "I see you're broken into harness. This is a great house. We're raisin' a Queen of Rooshy."

"'Relia is a very pretty girl," said Doris pleasantly. "Her hair is wonderful and her eyes and skin."

"Well, you can't get through life on looks," said Mr. Wilde; "looks is a small part of the whole business. Some of the homeliest people in the world have made the most friends an' been the nicest to have around."

Doris felt a little ray of comfort steal into her heart. She went into the sitting room and raised the shades evenly. The early light showed the dolls' house and to Doris it seemed like a fairy palace. Nobody had forbidden her to touch it, and she laid a hand lightly on the red, sloping roof, and bent down to look into the dainty rooms. All the child in her nature tingled to take the lovely baby out of its crib, and to make the gentleman and lady walk down the real stairs. She was aroused by the sharp voice of her mistress.

"Snooping and spying, of course."

"Please, Mrs. Wilde, I am not touching anything, but who could help but admire these pretty, pretty things?" replied Doris, cheerfully. There was no sullenness or resentment in her tone. Mrs. Wilde drew nearer. She was a trifle ashamed of her violence the day before, and very proud of the house that had been built to order by a carpenter at the Corners, and fitted up by herself at night when Aurelia was asleep.

"Yes, I spent a lot of time and money on that toy," she said, "but 'Reely doesn't seem to care much about it. She hardly touches it now. She's going to have a piano this Christmas."

"How wonderful!" said Doris.

"Yes," said Mrs. Wilde, "I'm quite set on it. Her father don't approve, but it's quite time she commenced to play. Now hustle an' clean up that

zinc, and dust everything thorough. I must stir up some muffins."

Doris went fleetly about her task. It gave her a chance to go on with the splendid lines she was learning, and also to cast many a glance at the snowy landscape. There had been another storm in the night, and she could hardly repress a cry of exultation as she saw all the dazzling phenomena of the poem revealed by the first rays of the winter sun. She wondered if Kelsey Starr saw them too. Mrs. Wilde had closed the sitting-room door to keep out the odor of frying, and just then Kelsey came around the corner of the house with a large wooden shovel, to clean off the side porch and make a path to the road. Doris drew the little book from her pocket, tapped on the window pane, and the cover, and pointed jubilantly to the gatepost, with its "tapering turret," to the Parian marble wreaths on the dog-kennel and chicken-coop, to the full, even whiteness of the lane "from wall to wall," and Kelsey understood and nodded enthusiastically, returning her smile, and glad for the door he had opened to a lifelong pleasure.

When the breakfast tray went up to Aurelia with the light dainty muffins and broiled chop, she refused to touch the food, and demanded griddle-cakes and maple syrup. She crushed the muffins and threw them at Doris. It happened

that Mrs. Wilde was coming up the stairs and saw the performance from the landing.

"What is the matter with the muffins, I'd like to know?" she demanded. "They were my very best rule and lighter'n a feather."

"I want griddle-cakes," declared the household tyrant.

"Well, you won't get 'em this morning," said her mother. "The top of the stove's all cold, for I've just filled it up for ironin'. Now, eat that chop and drink your cocoa, for I've something to tell you."

"What is it?" pouted Aurelia, picking up her knife and fork.

"Your father and I talked it over last night. We talked till midnight and we ain't spoke sence. But you're goin' to have lessons two days in the week. 'Lias Turner's daughter, Louise, down in Kent, is home from Broadriver Seminary, and she's tutorin' this winter at the Stebbinses and the Allens, and she'll come here too and attend to your studies."

"I don't want to study," said Aurelia, sullenly.

"Well, you've just got to," replied her mother. "There's no reason why you shouldn't be a fine lady one of these days. I'm willin' to work my fingers to the bone, but I can't do it all for you."

Doris was making a bed in the next room and could not help but hear the conversation.

"O," she said to herself, "I wish I could have such a chance! I would think that everybody in the House of Love ought to be able to learn. 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.' I wonder if that means that I won't have to go without an education. Why, of course it does!"

A wave of joy flowed through the heart of the child, and she began to sing softly as she beat up the pillows and smoothed the counterpane. "Why, I can't do without anything that is good in the House of Love, not even a dolls' house," ran on her happy thoughts.

Mrs. Wilde went downstairs, calling out to Doris, "Now, don't dally! As soon as 'Relia's dressed, I want you to clean the knives."

But Doris was not destined to clean knives that morning. Aurelia had a sudden desire to play with her dolls' house.

"I haven't played more with it," she said to her mother, "because it takes two. I want Doris to run the kitchen and the nursery while I'm doing the parlor. I can't move all the dolls at once. You said you got Doris for me."

Mrs. Wilde grudgingly yielded, and Doris could hardly breathe for joy. All the morning the two children sat on the floor before the fairy palace. Doris was a rare playmate. Without seeming to do so, she named the hitherto nameless residents of the house, invented a series of thrill-

ing domestic happenings, invited company from among some long-neglected small dolls in Aurelia's chest, and just before the dinner bell rang to summon Thaddeus and the hired men to the noon meal, a false alarm of fire in the make-believe night, when the doll family and guests were all asleep, sent them flying down the stairs and out into the street with what valuables they could secure and made a brilliant *dénouement*, especially when the distracted father rushed back after the forgotten baby. Aurelia had started in to be contrary and dictatorial, but actually forgot herself in the charm of the little beggar girl's imagination, and had the best time she had ever known in her life. Mrs. Wilde had been too astonished to interfere, although highly displeased to see Doris on such equal terms with her idol.

"Now, 'Relia," she said, "it's very true that I got Doris Avery here to wait on you, for you've got to get used to having a maid, but she's got to help with the housework too. I can't have her foolin' away her time as if she was a visitor."

"She's a lot of fun," retorted 'Relia, "more'n Mary Hollis or Emma Skinner. I'm sorry I called her names, and she didn't get the grease on that red dress either. I did it my own self, so there!" And 'Relia betook herself to the far side of the room, with an instinctive desire to escape what was surely coming. Mrs. Wilde turned

white with rage. The spoiled dress meant more to her than 'Relia's deceit or the painful injustice to Doris.

"I've never laid hands on you yet," said she, "much as you've deserved it, and I don't intend to now; but I will think of some punishment that you'll wish hadn't never come into my head. I'll tell you to-morrow what it'll be."

Something had awakened in Aurelia. She had committed the first noble and generous action of her life, and the sensation was new and strangely sweet, especially when a grateful look from Doris, and a low "Thank you," accompanied the plate of soup that Doris set on the small table.

A few days later Louise Turner appeared on the scene, and the unwilling Aurelia began the common English branches and French. The work went on in the sitting room, and as Doris was looking over dried peaches in the kitchen both voices were distinctly audible. Aurelia was undeniably stupid, and had to be told the same thing over and over. Once Mrs. Wilde sent Doris into the room to put some coal on the fire, and the teacher looking up saw a pair of glowing eyes so full of keen interest and desire that she determined to know the pale and awkward child, and gave her a smile that fortunately was not observed by Mrs. Wilde, but was like sunshine to the lonely little heart. Miss Turner went care-

fully over Aurelia's lessons for the next time. She perceived that the soil was stony and had no depth of earth, but she knew intuitively that no word was lost on the other child. When she left, Kelsey Starr brought the horse and cutter around from the shed, and as he tucked in the laprobe around her feet she said to him, "Who is the other little girl?"

"It is Miss Aurelia's maid," he replied with a mischievous flicker in his eyes. There was an answering glimmer around the corners of Miss Turner's mouth as she took the lines from Kelsey's hand, but although she had often seen him at the rector's house in Kent, she said nothing, but started her horse with his jingling bells along the spotless and shining road. When she came the next time she had prepared a typewritten list of twenty-five questions on Aurelia's third lesson, and at the close of the hour had a little interview with Mrs. Wilde. Miss Turner had a very gracious and charming manner, a pretty deference, that quite captivated Aurelia's mother.

"You know, Mrs. Wilde," said she, "that we both desire the very best results from my work with your daughter. She cannot best be served by stereotyped methods."

Mrs. Wilde raised her chin a trifle and beamed approvingly. "I wish it were possible," went on

Miss Turner, blending the dovelike and the serpentine in clever proportions, "that some one might work with your daughter between lessons, carefully going over a list of printed questions that I will take pains to prepare. Can you do this yourself, Mrs. Wilde?"

"Me, Miss Turner, me? Have you any idea what there is to do on a place like this, what with the chickens to feed and the butter to make, and all the meals to cook, an' the washin' an' ironin', and the hull house to keep tidy, an' sewing for Aurelia till all hours of the night? I don't never see an idle moment, Miss Turner, an' if I had six hands instead of two they'd be all of 'em busy from daylight to dark an' after. No, I ain't keepin' no boardin' school. I'm runnin' the heavy end of a farm. The men get done with their chores and sit around down to the Corners and smoke, but I never get out of sight of the next thing to be done."

"But, as I remarked, Mrs. Wilde," continued Miss Turner, cheerfully, "some one must help your daughter prepare the answers to my questions, and also ask the entire list. They are simple questions, which will not at first take much thought or time to look up. Is there no one in the house who can help me in this way? I might prepare phonograph records, but that would make the lessons very expensive. You have a very

bright young man here, Mrs. Wilde. Our rector speaks very highly of him. Perhaps he——”

Miss Turner realized that too much dove had fluttered into the conversation at the expense of the serpent, for Mrs. Wilde's countenance grew stern and forbidding.

“You have to summer and winter with some people to know 'em,” she said, darkly. “Kelsey Starr's had altogether too much made of him in some quarters.”

“Well, I will be very sorry to have to lose your little girl as a pupil, but I must carry out my method to get satisfactory results. Even a child of her own age would do nicely, provided she can read.”

“There's a child in the house,” said Mrs. Wilde. “Perhaps you haven't noticed her. I sent for her down to New York to wait on 'Relia and help me a little besides. Do you suppose she'll do?”

“May I see her, please?” inquired Miss Turner.

“Doris—Doris Avery!” called Mrs. Wilde without leaving her chair. Doris came shyly in from the kitchen. Miss Turner greeted her coolly. The radiant smile was wanting. “Little girl, can you read?”

Miss Turner did not dream that it was the clear, beautiful reading of Doris that had brought

about her own installation as a teacher for Aurelia.

"Yes, Miss Turner," replied Doris, timidly.

"Let me hear you, please," handing her a book of essays that she was to leave at a friend's house on her way home. Doris read a few lines. Mrs. Wilde glowered, and Miss Turner nodded approvingly. "That will do," she said in a highly professional manner, checking the "dear" that rose to her lips, for there was something wonderfully tender and appealing about the child. "I am positive, Mrs. Wilde," she went on, "that Doris is quite capable of reading my questions, so that Aurelia may be sure that she can answer them. At Broadriver Seminary there was some one employed to help us prepare our lessons. It worked beautifully."

"Well, I suppose you may as well do things your own way, so long as you take such an interest in 'Relia. It won't do any harm to try. I've always known she isn't ordinary. How much time do you suppose Doris will have to take from her work?"

"Half an hour three times a day," replied Miss Turner, "arranged according to your best convenience."

On this occasion when Kelsey brought the horse to the gate, Miss Turner said without a change of countenance: "The little Avery girl

is to work an hour and a half a day with Aurelia. It's my method."

Mrs. Wilde was looking out of the window, and saw only a serious and respectful lifting of Kelsey's cap, as the young tutor drove away. But Miss Turner heard him say under his breath, "Hip, hip, hurrah!" and a few moments later a black hen made an expostulatory flight from a stolen nest in the haymow, due to the wild gyrations and uproarious laughter of a youth who seemed to find his own company sufficiently exhilarating. As for Louise Turner, she was communing with herself along the snowy highway. "Yes, as her mother says, Aurelia is 'not an ordinary child,' and she isn't. She's the most extraordinarily stupid and lazy young person I have ever known. As for my method, it's a good one and I have a right to insist on it, haven't I, Betsey?" And she chirruped to the old brown mare and went merrily homeward. Doris did not dare to exhibit any pleasure over the new arrangement, but her heart was singing like a lark. Her keen intuition had divined the sympathy and kind intent behind Miss Turner's apparent indifference, for she had not forgotten that first smile. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies." How the blessed psalm was lighting up for her more and more! In the House of Love one simply cannot lack for friends, nor for

any other good thing, even if one is homely enough to turn milk sour. She had been coming up the cellar-stairs with the carrots when she had heard Mrs. Wilde say those very words about her.

But Grandma Lane had replied: "You can't always tell, Gale. Freckles is very deceivin'. I remember Janet Waverley when she warn't more'n ten years old. Folks reely pitied her mar. I found her once cryin' her eyes out up the store-room, 'cause she warn't good-lookin'. But she grew to be the most beautiful of all the Waverleys of my time, an' she was sech a lovely corpse it seemed wicked to put her away," and Grandma wiped away a retrospective tear. Doris looked at the pile of textbooks on the table as eagerly as a miser views a bag of gleaming gold. They were practically her own, for she could go with Aurelia into the enchanted land, and no one could keep her from gathering the precious fruit or ever take from her what once she had made her own.

CHAPTER V

THE CONSPIRACY

AURELIA's punishment was not at all in proportion to her offense. It consisted in her having to wear the hated red dress all day for three days; but she wore it so proudly that self-approbation quite counterbalanced the moral effects of her confession. For several days she continued stubbornly indifferent to her studies, in spite of the most patient efforts of Doris to share her own enthusiasm for book-learning. But she was evidently growing fond of Doris, although at times her temper blazed, and her sharp little tongue inflicted wasplike stings that brought a flush and tears to the averted face of the orphan. Miss Turner realized the difficulties under which Doris labored, and while she did not dare to manifest a direct interest in the child—and Doris, of course, never took any part in the recitations—she managed to send a note by Kelsey Starr to her silent pupil, which assured her of her sympathy and appreciation. At last the ingenuity of Doris triumphed over Aurelia's indifference, and Miss Turner received an almost paralyzing surprise in the shape

of a perfect lesson in United States history, arithmetic, and geography. By a little adroit questioning it developed that a set of paper dolls had been acting the drama of Pocahontas, the costumes of the Indians being particularly effective, and consisting largely of chicken feathers and paint; that the arithmetic, like the old-fashioned pill, had been concealed in a marmalade of the fun of attending a thrilling shopping-tour to New York with two purses filled with colored beads; that a very neat little map of the Western hemisphere had been decoyed from Aurelia's sluggish fingers by the allurements of making very blue lakes and oceans and a gorgeous rainbow of land divisions. Mrs. Wilde looked on day after day with constant irritation that so much of her small handmaiden's time was spent out of the treadmill of the kitchen, but she must not offend the private governess, and Aurelia was certainly growing more endurable to live with. Then, too, Mrs. Wilde did not for a moment realize what Doris was getting out of Miss Turner's method, as the latter maintained so distant an attitude to her young assistant as to disarm the mother's jealousy.

After a few weeks another good friend was raised up for the lonely child. In all the region of South Farms the person who did not habitually attend church was considered a suspicious charac-

ter, and Mrs. Wilde, anxious to keep up appearances, not so much for herself and Thaddeus as for that glowing and mysterious future of Aurelia's, always mustered her immediate household on Sunday morning and drove in the three-seated covered wagon to Waverley Ridge, where they occupied a rear pew in Saint Margaret's. She enjoyed seeing the Archers, the Murrays, the Morrisons, and Courtneys, and their guests. She gathered ideas for Aurelia's clothes, and invariably planned a wedding for her beautiful and accomplished daughter. Sometimes a yellow, again a green and white, oftener a pink wedding, with herself in a magnificent satin gown, and Thaddeus fresh from the Kent barber in the bravery of a Prince Albert coat and white kid gloves. Never had such a bride graced the chancel of Saint Margaret's; and the bridegroom would be dignified, stalwart, handsome, and rich beyond account. Some time Dr. Allston must come back to the old Manor House; and Anne Waverley's son, Robert, would marry, and the beautiful old rooms would be again gay with music and merriment. Thaddeus, always accustomed to the stir of an out-of-door life, invariably went to sleep during the service. Grandma Lane extracted a vague comfort from the sermon and two peppermint drops, with which she was ever provided. Aurelia fidgeted with her pocket

handkerchief, and Kelsey indulged in mental arguments against the positions taken by the clergyman. On the first Sunday that Doris made her appearance in Saint Margaret's she had enjoyed every minute of the drive from the farm between the snowy fields, and past the occasional homesteads that were within lamplight distance of each other. The entrance into Waverley Ridge had given her an unaccountable sense of suffocating pleasure. The wide, wide street, the giant, leafless, snow-decked elms, the Manor House looming gray and gloomily shuttered behind its lawns and hedges, the broad, cheery, lace-hung windows and roomy piazzas of the other houses, even the paths between walls of snow on the generous sidewalks, appealed to her imagination as nothing had ever done before. She felt as if she had lived and loved and belonged there, as if she had always seen the sun blazing on the gilded cross above the façade of Saint Margaret's exquisite stone church. And now as she entered the richly dim little Gothic structure, and heard the soft undertone of the organ, she seemed to fit into the surroundings.

"Holy, holy, holy, all the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the
glassy sea."

The spirit of Doris mounted on white wings far above the consciousness of her stiff, ugly felt hat

with its plain band of ribbon, Aurelia's cast-off everyday coat the previous winter, too tight in the armholes for looks or comfort, and the rough woolen gloves that irritated her chapped hands. Her mother seemed very near. The House of Love was folding them both in its eternal security and peace. Doris sang a sweet, true, natural alto, so sweet, in fact, that Miss Annet Graves, the postmistress from the Corners, who sat in front of the Wildes, glanced over her shoulder to see from whom the voice proceeded. Miss Graves had been the leading soprano for years in the Congregational choir in Kent, and as time went on and she did not hear herself as others heard her, she had been subjected to the sort of strategy that disposes of an undesirable incumbent by bringing about a seemingly voluntary resignation. A chorus choir of young people were to replace the old quartet. Miss Graves retired amid the splendor of a surprise party and a plated silver tea-service. The chorus choir did not give satisfaction, and a month or two later saw a new quartet installed with the oldest deacon's pink-and-white granddaughter as soprano. Perhaps a prouder, less sensitive nature could have sat in the congregation, joined in the hymns heartily, and never seemed to wince, but Miss Graves had turned her horse's head on Sundays toward Waverley Ridge until she could gather strength to

literally "face the music." Thus it was that on the first Sunday that Doris attended Saint Margaret's, Miss Graves heard that plaintive, silvery alto that made her turn halfway around in her pew. Aurelia was radiant in a new blue velvet hat and coat to match, but she could not sing a note; and Mrs. Wilde's quick jealousy flamed up, and she gave Doris an almost savage nudge with her elbow and an irate glance, so that the tuneful notes ended abruptly; and Miss Graves looking again saw downcast lids and a trembling lip. She had heard of the coming of the little orphan girl to the Wildes, and she had long known the attitude of Mrs. Wilde toward Aurelia.

She knew that she had unwittingly been the cause of the rebuff to the child, and her kind heart prompted her to some long, long thoughts as the service proceeded.

When the congregation sat down at the close of the hymn, Doris was still struggling with the lump in her throat. She had been so happy a few moments before. Surely in the House of Love one ought to be able to praise God. She looked longingly at the double row of surpliced children, whose clear voices had rung out in the processional and the anthem. She had already looked up in the hymnal the number of the next hymn on the bulletin board. It was one that her mother had taught her, and they had often sung

it together, soprano and alto. She loved it best of all the hymns, and now she would have to sit silent and suppressed.

"And you live in the House of Love!" something seemed to whisper tauntingly in her ear. She clung desperately to the thought that had saved her from despair. "Yes, I do, I do! But perhaps it's the cellar, and it is sort of dark and cold, and there must be an upstairs. O, I know how it is!" she thought, and her throat relaxed, and her face brightened. "I must go up the long stairs myself one step at a time. The stairs are love, and every time I do not hate back, I go up one step, and when I wash the dishes the very cleanest I can, I go up another step, and if I get angry I go back several steps. Perhaps if I try very hard, I will get up in the sunshine where I can sing all I like."

Mrs. Wilde was intently studying the velvet bow on young Mrs. Waverley Archer's hat, Thaddeus had settled down in the aisle end of the pew, and Grandma Lane had taken her first nibble of peppermint lozenge, when Kelsey Starr, who sat between Mr. Wilde and Doris, hit one foot surreptitiously against her shoe, and, as she looked up, cast a swift glance at the floor near Mrs. Wilde on the other side of Doris. She dropped her eyes in the direction indicated, and under the edge of the kneeling-board beheld the bright

black optics of a little gray mouse. As she watched, it glided softly under the folds of Mrs. Wilde's best serge gown. It was well known in the household that although Mrs. Wilde had broken more than one colt, had caught an intruding bat in her hands, and had driven alone after the doctor in the middle of the night without a tremor, she had a terror of mice alive or dead. When this mouse disappeared, Kelsey fixed his eyes on a stained-glass prophet in a red robe, set his teeth hard, clenched a hymn book, and shook inwardly. Doris felt the vibrations, bit her lip and almost stopped breathing in her anxiety. Mrs. Wilde moved her feet uneasily, at the same time glancing down to note if Aurelia's were touching hers. But that young person's smart russet boots were firmly supported by the back of the next pew. At the same moment the tiny invader fled along the footboard past the unsuspecting Grandma, and went—whither? It was a side pew, with the far end close up against the wall. Mrs. Wilde's substantial frame trembled with a suppressed shriek. She turned pale and cold. Where was that mouse? Where might it not be any moment? It could not get out without returning to the aisle, and passing, but would it pass—her? She arose, brushed past Doris, Kelsey, and her husband, and reached the door, her heart thumping like that of a fugitive slave with

bloodhounds in the rear. Thaddeus, supposing that his wife was ill, dutifully took his hat and overcoat and followed her out. She was standing on the outside steps.

"What did you come out for?" she said, tartly, to Thaddeus.

"Thought something was wrong with you, Gale."

It had been several years since he had called her by her first name, but many people are so conservative that a thorn in the side would be parted with reluctantly provided they had had it some time, and to Thaddeus there was something altogether revolutionary in the thought of anything happening to his wife, who seemed made of iron and steel.

"It was very hot in the church," she said, a little more gently. "I won't go back. Suppose we take a drive over to Westbrook. It ain't far, and I've been wanting to see the new Mathison house."

They went on in silence for a time, Abigail sharing the front seat with her husband. She stole a look at him, and noted that he was getting a bit gray. He wasn't such a rough-looking man, after all, fresh-shaven and in his Sunday coat, and he had built up a good business, and was well respected, and he had been very kind to her when they were first married. Probably he always

would have been kind in his clumsy way if she had not been so bitter and discontented. He took her and her mother when they were penniless and gave them a good home and enough to eat and to wear. To be sure, she had done her part toward their success, but he had worked hard too, early and late, and she had treated him as if he were the hired man. Doubtless he would have been glad of a little affection, but she had given him none, and had kept the child from him too. Who was she to have married a fairy prince?

"Thaddeus," said she, "what do you make of that Avery girl?"

"Why, I really can't say, Gale."

"There's something awfully queer about her. Sometimes I think I almost hate her and those big gray eyes of hers, and I try to make it hard for her too. You know I hit her once, but I just don't want any human bein' to look at me as she did—not like a human bein' it wasn't, but as if her dead mother was lookin' right through her eyes. Seems to me there's somethin' all around her, an' I can't get at her. Then 'Reely's getting so she wants her with her all the time; and I must say that 'Reely hasn't sent back her breakfast tray in several days, and isn't near so snappish as she was. Well, I shut her up in church anyhow, the little upstart, attracting attention to her singing!

I declare, Thaddeus, I believe I'm gettin' nerves, but that child makes me so uncomfortable that I'm mad enough to cry! She makes me somehow out of sorts with myself."

"Yes, when I see a lonsum little critter like that," replied Thaddeus, slowly, "always with a pleasant word for everybody, I think it's a pity that she has to do it all. I really look forward to hearing her say, 'Good mornin', Mr. Wilde.' I don't like to go out till I've heard it."

"O, Thad, do you care like that? And I ain't scarcely noticed you for years. In fact, I haven't never treated you halfway decent." And for the first time in all their married life Abigail laid one of her capable hands over on the toil-hardened ones that held the reins. To be sure, it wasn't a very romantic caress, as the gray woolen gloves of Thaddeus were not an attractive object even to the eye of love, but to the starved and obliterated man it had in it a thrill of hope of better days that did not require a background of moonlit nights and nightingales to make very real and precious.

"Gale," he said, choking a little, "I don't believe a fellow ever was more set on a girl than I was on havin' you. I oughtn't to have cornered you when you were down and out. It wasn't right. You were heaps too smart and handsome for me, but I loved you, I did indeed, Gale, and if you

could have loved me even a little, I think we might have been quite happy."

"I think we'd get on better if you took more interest in 'Relia," said Mrs. Wilde, congealing perceptibly.

"Land of Liberty!" ejaculated Thaddeus. "I ain't never been allowed to touch that piece of chineyware with a ten-foot pole. You know, Gale, that I don't approve of puttin' all these highfalutin' idees into the child's head. If you ever succeed in boostin' her up to the top, she'll have no more use for them that's raised her. She'll be no comfort to her mother. Her father ain't never took none yet with her."

"I don't care," said Abigail, doggedly, "if she never speaks to us again, once she's where she belongs, and where she's goin' to be, too! If I can see her in her own automobile with a fur coat down to her heels—and I was goin' to say diamonds in her ears, but I notice the Waverley Ridge people never wear their diamonds in the daytime—I don't care if she passes us on the road and never sees us. We could see *her* all right!"

The subject was a root of bitterness, and the two relapsed into silence. Nevertheless, the love that the little girl under their roof was sending out day by day had gently touched them both with its tender but potent influence. For a moment

their hearts had softened and gone out toward each other, and as they drove back toward the church, life was not quite the same—not altogether so grim and cold.

In the meantime Doris, freed from the unfriendly proximity of Mrs. Wilde, had an opportunity during the sermon to recover from her painful struggle with unseemly mirth, and to regain a peaceful mood; and when the last hymn was announced she realized that she was at liberty to join in the singing, which she did quietly but with all her heart.

“The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his,
And he is mine forever.”

Miss Graves stopped singing to listen. It was not a strong voice, but had a wonderful quality—so clear, plaintive, exquisite that it sounded amid the commonplace strains of the congregation like a priceless violin played to the accompaniment of a parlor organ. And near by stood the organist's little wife, who could not sing herself, but adored her husband as a sort of inglorious Beethoven. That very morning had he not improvised the offertory organ solo, and was it not far better than many in the book? She also cast a swift, backward glance, and exchanged a look of understanding with Miss Graves. Consequently, when

the service had concluded, Miss Graves greeted Grandma Lane and Aurelia, for she knew everybody; and then held out a kindly hand to Doris, with a clasp so warm and a look of such sincere, personal interest that the child's heart drank in the unspoken friendliness as a flower the dew of heaven. Then Miss Graves turned and went across the aisle for a confab with Mrs. Melden, the organist's wife.

"Quite unusual, wasn't it?" said Miss Graves.

"Lovely!" replied Mrs. Melden. "I must speak to Mr. Melden. He needs just such a voice in the junior choir. What a pity—she isn't a bit pretty, is she?"

"I don't know about that," said Miss Graves. "When you look right into her eyes she's beautiful. It's an awful shame for Thad. Wilde's wife to be riding roughshod over that dear child."

"But my, what a picture that little Aurelia Wilde is growing to be!" said Mrs. Melden's younger sister, who was studying art in New Haven and had run up for a week-end, according to an occasional impulse. "I wonder if I can have a try at her portrait. One rarely meets with such features and coloring."

Whereupon Miss Annet Graves had an inspiration, and one that detained her in earnest conversation with these ladies and Mr. Melden, who had joined the group, until all the other people

had gone and the sexton stood waiting to lock up the church. Consequently, in the middle of the week Mrs. Wilde was electrified by the sight of the Melden sleigh drawing up to the front gate, with Mrs. Melden and Miss Graves snugly ensconced in the bearskin rugs. Mrs. Melden had been an Archer on her mother's side before her marriage and was therefore entitled to a firm seat on one of the upper branches of the Waverley tree. Her husband was the treasurer of one of the largest manufacturing firms in Kent. As a happy side issue in his busy life he played the organ and directed the choir at Saint Margaret's. Mrs. Wilde only knew the Meldens by sight as belonging to the elect who breathed the rarefied atmosphere of the Ridge society, and her heart beat rapidly as she sent Doris to wrestle with the seldom-used lock of the front door, while she, herself, gave a look into the small mirror by the kitchen sink, glad of her clean linen collar and her neatly brushed hair.

Doris could not turn the key in the rusty lock, and Mrs. Wilde came to her assistance, frowning impatiently, and pushing her away so savagely that she tripped over the mat and fell, hitting her forehead on a corner of the front stair with considerable force. Just as she fell the doorbell rang. Mrs. Wilde did not realize that Doris was slightly stunned for a moment ; but expecting her

to rise instantly, applied her muscular hands to the doorknob and key with such force that the door yielded suddenly, and the visitors beheld the little girl in the act of getting to her feet. Customary formalities were omitted as Miss Graves involuntarily sprang forward to the help of Doris, but Mrs. Wilde anticipated the action and half carried the child along to the kitchen to Grandma Lane, saying, loudly: "Mar, Doris has bumped her head, but not bad. Just put some brown paper wet with vinegar on the place." Then she returned to the frosty hall, shutting the kitchen door behind her. It had only been a moment, and she said to the ladies: "Please walk right in this way to the sitting room. We don't keep our parlor warmed up in winter, for it's a north room. Be seated, ladies."

She was smiling strenuously, but was furiously angry underneath.

"I hope the little girl is not much hurt," said Mrs. Melden, graciously.

"O, no," said Mrs. Wilde. "She tripped over the mat. She's a very clumsy child, not light on her feet like some."

"We have come," said Mrs. Melden, "to call on you and tell you that my sister, Miss Holcomb, who is an artist, a portrait painter, in New Haven, has been very much attracted by your little daughter, and wishes me to inquire if she may

have the privilege of making a portrait of her for the special art exhibition of next summer." A sudden, sharp, hungry gleam leaped to Abigail Wilde's eyes. The never-sleeping tiger of her ambition was ever crouching for a spring at its coveted prey. But she seemed to hesitate, and tried to appear indifferent.

"Well, I don't know," she said, slowly, although her pulses were beating so fast that her tongue seemed ready to slip its leash of discretion and race along in mad delight. "I heard it's pretty expensive, ain't it?"

"O, this will cost you nothing at all, Mrs. Wilde. My sister often comes up on Friday nights to spend the Sunday with us. I'm her only sister, you know, and she just loves our home life, and the children. You would only have the trouble of sending your daughter up to our house early on Saturday afternoons. Of course it will take several months. We will send her down to the Corners at five o'clock, as Mr. Melden goes to New York every Saturday morning, and comes back on the express that gets here at five-fifty, and the man drives down to meet him. Mr. Melden always gets back in time for the quartet rehearsal Saturday nights. The junior choir rehearses at three-thirty on Saturday afternoons. Miss Gladys Courtney attends to that for him. She is so musical, you know."

"Will 'Relia have to be very much dressed?" inquired her mother, still trying to subdue the eagerness that was throbbing from head to foot.

"O, no," replied Mrs. Melden, "just a simple white dress is best. You know her hair is so beautiful that it would be a pity to divide the effect."

"Mrs. Melden's hired man can leave Aurelia at my house, Mrs. Wilde; for you know I'm always home when Silas and Pepper bring the mail bag," said Miss Graves, as if trying to forestall a possible objection.

"Well, I s'pose she can go all right, only there's one thing about it, Mrs. Melden: if we ain't grand and stylish, we are pretty independent, and I don't like taking favors I can't return, and of course, it is a favor, havin' my daughter painted for an exhibition."

"You needn't worry at all about that, Mrs. Wilde. You see, my sister hopes to do such a fine piece of work that it will bring her in a number of profitable orders. So it's about even, after all. However, there is one thing that you can do for us all, Mrs. Wilde, and something that we will appreciate very highly."

"Well, you may be sure, Mrs. Melden, that anything in my power is yours to command."

"It is simply this: you have a little girl living in your family who has a remarkably sweet voice,

and Mr. Melden would like it very much if she can join the junior choir and come to the Saturday rehearsals to practice for our Sunday morning service."

Mrs. Wilde grew suddenly black in the face, and Mrs. Melden hastened to add, "Of course we will consider your kindness in this respect as more than an offset to anything my sister can do for your daughter."

"I don't very well see how I can spare her," said Abigail, hoarsely. "She came here to help me with the housework and to wait on 'Relia. Saturday afternoon's a busy time in most fam'lies, and we ain't any exception. As it is, she loses a lot of time from the work just because 'Relia won't study or play much without her. Miss Turner realizes that 'Relia ain't ordinary, and says it's better for somebody to take hold of her lesson with her.

"Mr. Melden and Miss Courtney are both very anxious, Mrs. Wilde. In fact, the entire music committee of Saint Margaret's will be indebted to you. My sister is so interested in Mr. Melden's work that she said to me just before she took the train Monday morning, 'Please be sure and say to that little girl's mother that I will take my pay out in the loan of the other child for Robert's choir.'"

"But you see, Mrs. Melden," continued the dis-

concerted Abigail, "Doris Avery hasn't been with us many weeks, and she came with almost nothin' in the shape of clothes and I haven't had much time to fix her up. She hasn't got good enough things to be standin' up where everybody can see her."

"You forget, Mrs. Wilde," interposed Mrs. Graves, "that that is the beauty of having surplices for the choir; every child is dressed exactly alike."

Abigail longed to refuse, but if she did not allow Doris to go, then she could not with any face at all send Aurelia to the Meldens' house. It was not alone the thought of the portrait that allured her, but the introduction of Aurelia into one of the Ridge families thus early in her career, for who could tell in time what other doors might open to her idol?

"I wonder how the little girl is feeling by this time," inquired Mrs. Melden. "It was a pretty heavy fall."

For the sake of appearances Mrs. Wilde rose, saying, "I'll go and see. I left her with my mother." She disappeared into the kitchen, and Miss Graves looked at Mrs. Melden, moving her lips but not speaking audibly, "She knocked that child down herself!"

Mrs. Melden lifted her eyebrows and nodded affirmatively. Abigail returned immediately,

leading Aurelia radiant in the favorite light-blue cashmere and a dainty white apron.

"Doris is all right," said Mrs. Wilde. "Shake hands with the ladies, Aurelia."

Aurelia performed the ceremony with a self-assurance quite remarkable. "I've been watching the bump on Doris's forehead," said Aurelia. "It's as big as a butternut and 'most as black."

"Hush!" said her mother. "People are always bumpin' their heads against shelves and the edges of doors. It ain't anything at all."

"Well, we must be going," said Mrs. Melden. "After a few weeks, Mrs. Wilde, you must come up and see how the portrait is getting on."

The ladies left smilingly, not daring to ask to see the orphan girl, for there was something militant about the atmosphere of their hostess. They consoled themselves, however, with the knowledge that the object of their call had been attained.

"One didn't need eyes to see through a board to know that that poor young one wasn't pushed headlong because she couldn't open that door," declared Miss Graves.

"Yes, I felt the same way," replied Mrs. Melden, "and it made me all the more determined to carry our point."

"The child will probably have to do double work to get off," went on Miss Graves.

"But I shall try to make it so pleasant for her that she won't mind," said Mrs. Melden, cheerily.

Doris, with her aching head bound up by Grandma's sympathetic hands, was scrubbing the milk-room floor, when Mrs. Wilde reappeared torn between joy and anger. "Now this is what I get by your singin' in church," she said to Doris. "I shut you up once, but I suppose after I went out on account of the heat, you tuned up again, didn't you?"

"Really, Mrs. Wilde, it didn't seem to me wrong to sing in church; and the last hymn was one my mother and I loved very much. Why, what has happened?"

"Enough, I should think. What those people can see in your little piping voice I can't make out, but here comes Mrs. Melden, whose mother was an Archer, and says her husband, who is the organist to Saint Margaret's, wants you in the junior choir. You'll look pretty in it, won't you? If 'Reely looked like you, I'd keep her locked up in a dark closet."

Doris was so overcome by amazement at the wonderful news that she hardly felt the sting of the last words.

"But you did not need to say I could go, did you, Mrs. Wilde?" she asked, hopelessly—and yet with a strange thrill as if something wonderful had occurred.

"Yes, I did," snapped her mistress. "I had to. Mrs. Melden's sister wants to borrow Aurelia to paint her portrait for an exhibition. She didn't say nothing about painting yours. But everybody knows that that church choir is the apple of the Melden family's eyes, and the sister said that she would do the portrait if her brother might have you for the choir! It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of, settin' you up there before the whole congregation. But I tell you, you'll have to get up an hour earlier on Saturdays, besides workin' late every Friday night too."

Tears were rolling over the cheeks of Doris, tears of wonder and joy, but Mrs. Wilde did not see them, for she had turned on an irate heel to talk it all over with her mother.

"I must say," said Grandma, unwisely, "that I'm very glad of it. I'm willin' to work extra myself to help the child get off!"

"Well, I'd like to know," grumbled Abigail, "what it is about that homely brat that makes you an' Thad an' 'Reely take such a shine to her. I don't believe myself in allowin' servants to step out of their places."

Doris forgot the pain in her head, her red and smarting hands, and the toil of bent back and tired knees.

"It's the House of Love, the House of Love,"

she was jubilantly declaring to herself, almost singing it, "and I knew that every one can praise God who lives in that house. There is nobody who can really keep one from singing who lives there."

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CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST REHEARSAL

THE next morning, when Doris was sent down to the store at the Corners for a box of baking powder, she met Miss Graves, who was coming out of the door.

"Come over and see me," she said, "on your way back. I want to send 'Relia some pieces I've got for dolls' clothes."

She had instantly noted that the hands of Doris were almost purple with cold. When the little girl appeared on the side doorstep she did not have to wait to pull the bell, for the door flew open and she was drawn into the warm little sitting room with rose geraniums in full bloom in the windows.

"Now, sit right down here," said Miss Graves, drawing forward a low, cushioned rocking-chair. "How is your head feeling to-day?"

"Just a little sore, thank you," replied Doris.

"Well, I'm very glad it isn't any worse. I have something for you."

Miss Graves disappeared for a moment and returned with a plate and a generous three-cornered

piece of chocolate layer cake. "It isn't rich. It won't hurt you one bit," she said, laying the plate on the child's lap. The eyes of Doris sparkled. "O, thank you. I just love chocolate cake," she said. "I was wishing for a piece last night when I took in 'Relia's supper."

"Do you mean to say that you don't get the same food as 'Relia Wilde?" asked Miss Graves, sharply.

"Nobody in the house has just the same," said Doris, "for Mrs. Wilde is very particular about 'Relia's health, you know. But we all have very good food, and enough of it, 'cept I do something to displease Mrs. Wilde, and then I get nothing but bread for dinner. I really try to do my work as nearly right as I can."

"I've heard she's a dreadful hard driver," said Miss Graves.

"There's a lot to do all the time," replied Doris, "and Mrs. Wilde is very quick. And isn't 'Relia handsome?"

"You brave, generous little soul!" said Annet Graves to herself; for she had been testing Doris rather than to gratify curiosity, of which she had but little concerning the Wilde house, as the ways thereof were well known far and wide.

"Yes, 'Relia is handsome enough, but I don't mean by that that I consider her beautiful. There's a big difference, you know. True, her

eyes are big and velvety, but they're like a cow's eyes, and nobody ever would pick out a cow for being intellectual. But, child," as Doris finished the icing of her cake, which she had saved to the last, and set the plate on the table, "do you mean to say you haven't any gloves in this biting weather?"

"I have some for Sundays," said Doris, pleasantly; "but Mrs. Wilde says that the fingers would come through so soon if I wear 'em for common."

"And look at your poor hands—all cracked and chapped! And, bless my soul, if that right knuckle isn't bleeding! Come here to me!"

Miss Graves led the way into the kitchen, poured some warm water into a basin, and said: "Now, you just hold those hands in the water for a few minutes, while I drop in a bit of this witch-hazel. There now, here's some white castile soap for a good lather. Now we'll rinse 'em, and before they're quite dry, here's the best stuff in the world for chapped hands—better than all the expensive stuff in the drug store."

Miss Graves took down a cracked china cup from the shelf. "This is nothing but mutton-tallow. I try it out myself, and put a teenty-weenty bit of geranium smell in it. Now rub it in real good. There now! Don't they feel better already?"

"O, thank you, yes!" said Doris.

Miss Graves bustled out and bustled in again. "Here," she said, "is a pair of my old white kid gloves. I have lots of 'em. Keep 'em on purpose. They're a mile too big, of course, but they're better so. And here's a pair of mittens that aren't too large. I'm always knitting 'em for somebody or other. That's right, draw the mittens right on over the gloves. And here's a little jar of the tallow. Be sure and rub it in when you go to bed, and sleep in the gloves. It will help a lot, even if you have to wash dishes and scrub. If your hands aren't in good order, it makes you feel put out all over. Here's a can of my best raspberries for Mrs. Wilde, and a roll of satin scraps and old ribbon ends for 'Relia. You know I do some millinery. Now you'll have to hurry. Wait, I'll put the baking powder, the tallow, and the pieces all in one paper. There now you're all right, my dear!"

"You are very kind!" said Doris, softly. "I guess you live in the House of Love, don't you?"

"Well, I've never heard of the place, I'm sure, but it sounds good. Where is it?"

"It's all the home I have," said Doris, "and, Miss Graves, as I was running along to the store I thought how everybody in the House of Love must have warm gloves in the winter, every-day gloves as well as Sundays, and then you called

me in and gave them to me. Good-by, and thank you ever'n' ever so much."

"Of all things!" exclaimed Miss Graves, as she watched the little brown coat go up the road.

When Doris arrived at the house Mrs. Wilde had gone out to the chicken yard to see her pet leghorns, and Doris had time to divest herself of the luxurious gloves and put them away. When Mrs. Wilde came in she was busily brushing down the back stairs.

"Seems to me you were gone an awful long time, Doris," she said.

"Miss Graves asked me in," said Doris. "She wanted to send those things."

'Relia had already strewn the kitchen table with the bright pieces of silk and satin, and was sorting them delightedly.

"People are beginning to notice 'Reely already," said Abigail. "I don't know as I need Annet Graves's raspberries. What ever has started her up to bein' so neighborly?"

"She gave me some mittens," said Doris, timidly. "She makes them all the time to give away."

"Of course you had to come in for something too," snapped Mrs. Wilde. "I want you to learn that you are here to do things, not to get things."

"When I am a very rich lady, mother," said Aurelia, tossing her bright head, "I will take

Doris from you to be my maid, and I shall give her lots of my old things."

"If my cup runneth over," thought Doris, digging into a corner with the whiskbroom, "I can't see how I'm going to need anybody's cast-off clothes."

Involuntarily she began to hum, "The King of love my Shepherd is," but Abigail called out, angrily, "Shut up, and do your stairs!"

"I'm glad she can't keep me still inside," thought Doris, and before she reached the foot of the flight she had gone over a list of French nouns, and reviewed the last poem that Kelsey Starr had copied in her book, "The Destruction of Sennacherib." She delighted in the wonderful lilt of the rhythm, the vivid metaphors, the high, clarion note of victory.

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming with purple and gold,
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea
Where the dark wave rolls nightly on blue Galilee.

She had looked up the story in the Bible, and it strengthened her faith and courage to know that even that great and splendid army availed nothing at all against the angel of the Lord. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" read a reference that she had found. "Why, I just ought to be glad all the time," she said to herself. "The House of Love is a great fort as well as a house,

and no enemy can ever take it or even get into it. The things that Mrs. Wilde says can't hurt me at all if I keep sweet inside and don't hate back!"

It seemed to both Aurelia and Doris that Saturday would never come, but at last two o'clock in the afternoon saw them both en route for Waverley Ridge. Mrs. Wilde had asked her husband to let Kelsey Starr drive, taking the sleigh, which was wide enough to hold three very comfortably. It was the first sleigh-ride that Doris had ever had, and the jingling bells seemed to give just the right expression to her gladness. Aurelia wore her grand blue velvet hat and coat, but Doris did not mind the contrast with her own attire. She and Kelsey had a merry time reciting alternately verses of the poems they had learned, each sometimes stumbling for a word that the other could triumphantly supply, and it is not difficult to believe that Kelsey occasionally tripped on purpose, that he might see the light dance in the eyes of Doris. It was good to see her so happy. It seemed so wonderful that she, Doris Avery, had been invited to join the junior choir! And the strong-willed Mrs. Wilde had to let her go, even when she could not bear to have her! "I 'spect the House of Love is full of perfectly splendid surprises," she thought. "I think I'm up out of the cellar now, and there's room after room to go through, and something beautiful in every one."

Kelsey left the girls at the Melden porch, both of them a trifle embarrassed. Timidly they followed the white-capped maid up the wide stairway, and into the nursery where Miss Holcomb was romping with two flaxen-haired little nieces.

"So glad to see you," she said, heartily, putting her young guests right at their ease. "Mrs. Melden was obliged to go to town with her husband this morning, but I am to do the honors. Eliza," to the maid, "just help these children out of their coats, and then I shall carry off Aurelia to my studio. Doris, I'm sure you like children. They will take you all over the house, and at a quarter past three the maid will take you over to the rehearsal, and when it is out, you are to come back here and we will all have a tea-party in the nursery, when the babies have their supper."

The nursery was the most beautiful room that Doris had ever seen. There was a sunny bay window with a wide-cushioned seat, a bright fire of pine logs on the broad hearth, a large, mossy-green rug, a long, low table covered with delightful toys and books, and over the mantel a choice photograph of the Madonna della Sedia.

She stood entranced before the picture. The two children, who had looked a little askance at the stranger with dress and shoes quite unlike any seen in their home before, saw a light on her face that drew them to her, one on each side.

"That's our Jesus By-low picture," said four-year-old Edwina, after a pause.

"Where did it come from?" asked Doris, softly.

"Mamma brought it over the big ocean," said six-year-old Helen. "There's a story about it. There's a lot more bigger pictures downstairs. Want to see them?"

So the three went down to the first floor, and Doris had her first glimpse of that Old World that her mother had seen and loved. But in the attic room there had been no pictures but word-pictures, those and her mother's face and the sunsets. Now she saw the Roman Forum, the Grand Canal at Venice, the Matterhorn, the Bay of Naples, a bit of quaint old Rothenburg, an interior of Westminster Abbey, and a few photographs of the world's greatest art treasures, the Virgin from the Ghent Altar, exquisitely colored, so that the wonderful blue of her gown was well suggested, a Rembrandt with its shaft of light, a del Sarto "Holy Family." Some of these were in the living-room, others in the library, and in the latter on three sides of the room low shelves of books, books, books! The child's heart swelled with a new sense of the richness of the world. Involuntarily she put out her arms as if to gather something of the glory of it all. A door had opened to her consciousness. This beauty, this

joy for the eye, the mind, the heart must all be in the wonderful House of Love. She hardly glanced at the silver and cut glass and exquisite china in the cabinets of the dining room, as they passed through to the conservatory. That was yet a wider revelation. She had never known that people could have a garden in the house, and the snow lying deep over the whole country. The warm, moist air was heavy with sweetness. The carnations, Mrs. Melden's favorite flowers, were staked in long, spicy rows, from white and pale pink down to glowing ruby. She had noticed, as in a dream, as she came down the stairs a tall crystal vase of yellow ones lighting the leaf-brown tones of the long living-room. Miss Holcomb, hurrying down the stairs to make sure that the hour for the rehearsal was not forgotten, came upon Doris suddenly, and all the artistic spirit in her recognized that the exquisite bit of flesh and blood she had just begun to put upon canvas paled into insignificance before the soul that flamed in the eyes of the little maid. Doris sighed as if awaking from a dream, and smiled.

"She likes our house very, very much!" said Helen, holding fast to Doris.

"Velly much!" echoed Edwina. "Now will you come up and play wiz me?"

"Doris hasn't time now, darling. She must go

over to the church, but she will come again," said their aunt. "Now we will go to Nanny."

A rather snobbish young nurse had returned from an errand to the village, and from her height of white, stiffly starched importance ran her eye over Doris with a scornful expression that seemed to observe every freckle, as well as the new front breadth of the old plaid dress that brought the adjoining dinginess more into evidence, and lighted finally on the coarse, heavy shoes that looked very much out of place on the rich rug. Truly, "Man judgeth by the outward appearance." Doris felt the hostile fire, but knew in her inmost heart that it could not hurt her. She need not allow it even to sear the joy that had come to her in the last half hour. Miss Holcomb herself held the tight coat for her, and Eliza, with a shawl over her head, not unkindly led the way down the street to the church gate, where she was about to leave her, when Doris's courage failed her and she said, "O, won't you please go in with me?"

"It ain't necessary," said Eliza. "Go right straight on to that side door. It ain't locked, and nothin' will bite you," and then she hurried away. Just then two pretty girls of her own age, in neat winter suits and soft furs, came chattering in at the gate. Doris thought they would speak to her and invite her to go in with them, but they

stared, nudged each other, and tittered rudely. Then a group of boys came running and shouting along. They did not notice Doris at all, but overtook the two girls at the church steps, and stood laughing and talking about school affairs, and a coasting party to come off that evening; and then they went in a gleeful bunch into the vestibule and the heavily carved oak door closed behind them. Doris could not gather courage to follow them. O, that somebody who lived in the House of Love would come! In a few moments somebody came. It was the rector himself, who very seldom looked in on the junior rehearsal. To-day he wished to see Miss Courtney about the Christmas exercises in the village hall. He came along with his eyes on the ground. He was thinking about the three divisions of his next Sunday's sermon on the "Good Shepherd," and did not notice the stray lamb just at hand. Doris knew so little about clergymen that she was afraid of them, and her tongue seemed paralyzed. Although Saint Margaret's was attended mostly by the Waverleys and the collateral families, strangers were supposed to be welcome, and a number of the plainer people living in the village made it their church home. Mr. Melden, who was quite democratic in his ideas, had not hesitated to select from the Sunday school for his children's choir the voices best suited for the work, quite

irrespective of the Waverley blood. Some of the older ladies had complained of the innovation. "You have your own Campo Santo," he said, "although there was only dirt enough brought from England for Sir Percival and Lady Margaret's vault to stand in, and the rest of you can only get as near as possible, although pedigrees are no passports to paradise. When it comes to praising God I believe that the rich and the poor should meet together."

Hence it was that the daughter of the village carpenter, a lovely girl of fifteen, with sweet face and gentle manners, with a clear soprano voice, led the processional on the girls' side. Her great charm lay in her thoughtfulness for others, and everybody loved her. It was she who now came into the gate and saw Doris standing alone. "Good afternoon," she said, pleasantly. "Have you come to the choir rehearsal?"

"Yes," said Doris. "Mr. Melden invited me, but I don't like to go in alone for the first time."

"Of course, it is hard," said Louise Brown, drawing the hand of Doris through her arm, "but you come right along with me. We won't go in at the big door facing the whole choir, but around through the little door in the back. If you once get into your chair, you won't mind after that."

So Doris made her entrance under the sheltering wing of her new friend's kindness just as

Miss Courtney was ringing the first bell for silence. Louise did not go directly to her own place, but sat down beside the newcomer in the last row. It was more of a singing school than an ordinary rehearsal. The first fifteen minutes were always allowed for sight reading. Doris had learned from her mother the scale and the staff, but had had no practice. She had the help, however, of an inborn musical sense, so that Miss Courtney, who walked up and down the aisles, observed that she was quick and attentive, and that her notes were true and very sweet. When the hymns for the following Sunday, and a simple anthem of easy range, had been well gone over, the leader announced that there was to be a delightful cantata on Christmas Eve, to be given by the choir and the Sunday school, that the parts would be given out the following Saturday, and work begin at once. There was a buzz of excitement over the statement, and more than thirty tongues were set in motion. Doris could hear "stage," "scenery," "costumes." "And a tree afterward?" called out one of the boys.

"Yes," said Miss Courtney, smiling, "the best we have ever had yet."

Then she rang the bell for silence and dismissed the class. Doris was the last in the outgoing stream. No one had greeted her. A few had noticed her as if questioning her right to be

there, and one miss with a pert air and flamboyant hair-ribbons had remarked audibly to a group of girls, with stupid sarcasm that was mistaken for wit, "Paris hat, girls!"

"They can't hurt me, they can't!" Doris was saying to herself. "The House of Love is a great, big, strong fort!"

Just then Louise Brown, who had been talking with the leader, approached Doris, saying, "Please wait a minute, Miss Courtney wishes to speak with you."

Doris went rather shyly up to the tall, stylish lady with eyeglasses. "You are the little girl of whom Mr. and Mrs. Melden spoke to me," she said, encouragingly. "I want to tell you that I have especially observed you to-day, and am much pleased with your voice. You are a little behind the rest on the sight reading, as they have had the exercises a longer time, but if you will come half an hour earlier than the rest every Saturday I will be most happy to help you to catch up with the class."

Doris could hardly believe her ears, but she managed to express her grateful acceptance of the offer.

"I suppose you are going to Mrs. Melden's now," she said. "I am walking right by the house. We will go together."

Thus it happened that Nanny, quite irritable

at the prospect of having Doris at the nursery tea, saw from the window the finest young lady in the Ridge coming down the street with one hand in her handsome sealskin muff, and the other clasping the brown woolen-gloved fingers of the girl in the uncouth shoes. And Miss Gladys Courtney was smiling down into the upturned face, while Doris smiled in return. Doris had white, even teeth that her mother had taught her to care for most faithfully, and when she smiled she had a charm of which she knew nothing.

"Well, I must say, I don't understand it," muttered Nanny. "It's some new crotchet of the master's, I suppose, and I'd better be nice to her."

So Doris, who was not looking forward with much pleasure to refreshments in the small kingdom of the white-starched nurse, was agreeably surprised to be welcomed without the sharp glance and contemptuous air. The children immediately set upon her for a story, and, seated in a wide, luxurious chair with a small girl perched on each arm of it, Doris was in the midst of an entrancing tale of what she saw in the open fire, when Miss Holcomb came in with Aurelia.

"Please, please go on!" cried Helen.

"Don't 'top, Doris!" pleaded Edwina.

But Eliza entered just then with a large tray piled with sandwiches and little frosted cakes and a pitcher of steaming cocoa, and by the time the

refreshments were consumed, Michael was at the door with the horses and the big sleigh. Aurelia was rather out of sorts. It had been somewhat tiresome posing for Miss Holcomb for nearly two hours, in spite of occasional relaxations enlivened by chocolate creams and Alice in Wonderland. She was annoyed to see the favor that Doris had secured from the children. She had heard Miss Holcomb say that they would take Doris over the house. She had not seen the house, and her mother had particularly charged her to notice everything in it.

"I'd like to live in a place like that!" she said in a low, discontented tone to Doris. "I hate our house. Up there the halls are warm like summer and all the doors of the rooms stand wide open. That's what I'm going to have some time. Won't you feel jealous, Doris Avery, when you see me in a bee-you-ti-ful long pink silk train, with the doors all open in winter, even the parlor door! Guess you'll wish you had it, won't you, Doris?"

"I'd like a nice house of my own and nice clothes," answered Doris; "but if you love everybody, you won't feel put out when they have them, even if you don't yourself. And the House of Love is the very beautifulest house there is, and there can't anybody take it away from me unless I hate back!"

"Is that a fairy story?" asked Aurelia, wondering.

"No, it's truer than anything," replied Doris. "It's as true as the Bible."

"Well, you're a very queer girl," said Aurelia. "Isn't this a lovely, soft sleigh? You sink away down in it. And the robe is so big. I like fur away up to my neck, don't you, Doris?"

"Yes," said Doris, "and the bells, and the snow, and that splendid star that has just come out!"

"You seem as if it all belongs to you," said Aurelia, pettishly, "even the star."

"And so they do," answered Doris, with a happy little laugh, "for they are all in the House of Love."

Just then they were surprised to find themselves already at the Corners, and Kelsey standing by the store steps waiting to walk home with them.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLUE DRESS

THE next morning, when the Wilde carryall with the entire family was about a quarter of a mile beyond the Green, on their way to church, old Brewster, the horse, suddenly went lame.

"There's no use tryin' to go on," said Thaddeus, gravely, inspecting the right hind leg with tentative fingers. "I expect it's rewmatis; at any rate, we can't drive a sufferin' animal up that long hill; and, besides, we'd never get there till after the benediction. Kelsey, you run along back to the barn and ride Jessop around here, an' then you can lead Brewster slow-like back home, while I drive the folks."

"Well, if this ain't a pretty howdy-do!" grumbled Abigail. "Just the Sunday before Thanksgiving, when the Waverleys from far and near will lots of 'em be back to see their folks, and two or three brides in the bunch at that!"

Poor Grandma, who seldom had an outing except on Sunday mornings, looked ready to cry. "It's quite a disappointment," she said, feebly. "It makes the time seem so long between."

"I'm glad of it," said 'Relia, the wearing of whose velvet coat was no longer a novelty. "I hate church anyhow!"

She had not forgotten that Doris was to sing in the choir for the first time, although Doris herself had not referred to the matter. For a few moments Doris felt as if she must burst into tears. She would feel so ashamed not to be there after the Meldens and Miss Courtney had been so kind, and would expect her to appear in her place. Then she realized that if it were right for her to go, nothing could keep her back, lame horses, or even Mrs. Wilde. Just then Miss Graves came along with her one-seated sleigh.

"Good morning," she called out, cheerily. "What is the matter?" and she drew up the brown mare alongside of the wagon.

"Brewster's took bad in one of his legs," replied Thaddeus, "and we've sent back for Jessop."

"Well, I'm sorry I can't take you all in," said Miss Graves. "I can squeeze two small people like Grandma and one of the children in with me."

"O, let me go, let me go!" cried Aurelia, starting to climb down over the wheel.

"Now I think of it, my dear," said Miss Graves, suavely, "I had better take Doris, because Mr. Melden will expect her in the processional. Come, Mrs. Lane, come, Doris!"

Aurelia had only wanted to go in order to keep

Doris at home, and her temper blazed hotly as she saw the trio slip gaily over the snow. Mrs. Wilde herself was too furious for words for a few moments. Then she said, savagely: "This is going beyond all bounds. I didn't get the youngun' up here to be made of and put forward. The thing shall stop, and stop right away!"

"Don't begrudge the child a little time off!" said Thaddeus. "She works like a woman."

"She works all right," replied Abigail. "That's one thing that frets me. I can't find fault with what she does. It's her. I hate her! If she'd only get mad or even sulky or sassy, I'd like her better. You can't get a good chance at anybody that don't answer back, and there ain't no good excuse for punishin'. This choir business is what gets me, and I don't know how to help it if I want 'Reely's picture painted for the exhibition."

"Well, it don't do you no hurt, does it?" queried Thaddeus. "Doris works overtime early and late to make up. And she sure doesn't interfere with 'Reely. A poor little critter like that ain't goin' to get in the way of anybody. Let her take a bit of comfort if she can get it."

"She gets enough comfort playing with our daughter," declared Abigail. "This gallivantin' has got to come to an end, just as soon as 'Reely's picture is done."

It is a regrettable fact that Kelsey Starr did

not hurry on his errand. The sight of Mrs. Wilde and Aurelia stalled beside the snowy road on their way to church was one to be cherished in the mind beside the companion picture of Miss Annet Graves's cutter speeding on its way to the Ridge. Even while he was entering the stall to untie Jessop he stopped, slapped his leg, and chortled unrighteously.

As for Doris, Miss Graves took her into the vestry room, procured her black gown and surplice, shielded the plaid dress from observation while the little robe was adjusted, concealing under its simple, friendly folds the shabbiness of the poor, even as it also hid from admiring eyes costly fabrics of the rich. Doris felt wonderfully at ease, and had never looked so well in her life. Her heavy, handsome braid of glinting brown hair hung down her back quite unrivaled in fineness and color and weight by any other in the score of girls. Her eyes were alight with excitement and pleasure. Miss Graves did not leave her until she had been assigned her place beside another girl at the end of the line. Then from the distant organ came the opening chords of "The Church's One Foundation," Miss Courtney gave them the exact pitch, and the ranks moved on slowly, slowly into the dim, beautiful sanctuary, singing the glorious words to that inspiring tune that of all others belongs to them.

"Talk about matches being made in heaven," Miss Graves had once remarked, "that's one of 'em."

To Doris it seemed like a heavenly dream when she found herself seated in the choir stall, sheltered by position and numbers from the eyes of the congregation, her poverty out of sight beneath the comforting vestments. Only last Sunday she was standing down there near the entrance, humiliated and suppressed by the inimical personality of her mistress. To-day she was helping to lead the worship of the whole congregation, for that hour at least, free as any to praise the loving Father who is ever mindful of his own. That some of the girls did not regard her with favor did not trouble her at all. The House of Love is not only a fold and a fort, but it is a palace. They are the King's children who dwell there. Who can look down on the King's daughter in her Father's house?

Miss Graves was on hand to help her into her hat and coat, as before intervening skillfully between unfriendly eyes and the cheap clothing. Mr. Melden came and spoke cordially to her. "You did well," he said.

Miss Courtney charged her not to forget the early lesson on the next Saturday.

Doris smiled. Imagine forgetting to eat if she were very hungry! The start homeward was

somewhat delayed, as Miss Graves had another prolonged confab with Mrs. Melden and her sister.

"Dear Grandma," said Doris, giving the old lady's arm a loving squeeze, when they were finally tucked into the sleigh and on their way home, "weren't you a bit lonesome this morning?"

"No," replied Mrs. Lane, "I warn't. It seemed sorter restful-like."

Miss Graves took them to the horse-block in front of their house, and as they thanked her and said good-by, she remarked to Doris, "The next time you come down to the store be sure and come in, whether I see you and knock on the window or not."

"But I'm sure I can't come very soon," said Doris. "Mrs. Wilde laid in a stock of things yesterday."

"I'll see that she gets there," said Grandma, "somehow or ruther."

Doris was so happy that she felt prepared to meet the worst that Mrs. Wilde had in waiting, for she knew that the latter was very sore about the episode of the morning.

"Well, here comes Adelinar Patti," she sneered as Doris opened the door. "Didn't the whole congregation lay down their singin' books to listen? Guess they wouldn't want to look very long if they got one good sight of that face of hers."

Aurelia, who was also in a bad mood, giggled insolently.

"There, there," said Thaddeus, drawing up his chair to the table, "that's enough!"

Doris flushed a little, but said not a word as she passed through to put her hat and coat in their accustomed place. "She seems like a big, angry wasp," she thought, "but she really hasn't any sting. She thinks she has, and she makes a terrible buzzing, but it's outside of my house."

There was always a lull on Sundays in the activities of the household, and Doris looked forward to an hour or two that she might possibly have to herself in the afternoon. But to-day, after she had toiled unassisted over the mountain of dishes, Mrs. Wilde brought out a large biscuit-box half filled with buttons of all shapes and sizes, and a yard of old muslin, with needle, thimble, and thread. "Now," she said to Doris, "you may sew on buttons for the next two hours."

"Mother never sewed on Sunday," replied Doris. "She didn't think it was right."

"Well, I'm not your mother," snapped Abigail, "and thank fortune for that! This will help you remember not to walk right over your betters next time. Mr. Wilde an' 'Reely an' me are going for a ride. Grandma will be takin' her nap, and Kelsey Starr always walks to Kent on Sunday afternoons, so it will be quiet enough

here for a while and the buttons won't give out. Put 'em on in even rows 'way acrost the cloth."

The Wildes departed, Grandma went to her room, and Kelsey came down into the kitchen prepared to start for his usual visit, when he saw Doris perched on a high wooden chair at the table with a heap of buttons before her.

"O, Moses!" said Kelsey, "what has the Dragon given you to do now?"

"It's punishment," replied Doris. "It's about the tiresomest thing she could think of, because it doesn't mean anything. Just sewing on buttons for the sake of sewing them on—buttons, that aren't used at all. I was just thinking, when you came down, that perhaps I can turn it into something pleasant."

"I'll tell you," exclaimed Kelsey, pulling off his worn overcoat and beaming enthusiastically, "I'll bring down one of my books and read to you."

"But you'll lose your afternoon in Kent," said Doris. "I don't want you to give that up on my account."

"I hadn't any special engagement," replied Kelsey. "I have a standing invitation to supper at two or three places, but nobody knows whether I'm coming, or makes a bit of difference on my account. I'd much rather stay and help you pass the afternoon. Just wait a bit." And Kel-

sey ran upstairs two steps at a time and came back with Anne of Geierstein. "This is one of my favorites," said he. "Of course we can't get very far with the story, but we'll trust to luck to finish it some time. Have you read any of Scott?"

Doris turned a bright and grateful countenance toward her good knight. "I've read parts of 'Ivanhoe' aloud," she replied, "and all of 'The Lady of the Lake.' What is this one about?"

"It takes you right into the heart of the Swiss Alps," said Kelsey, "and the ruin of an old castle. But you are not going to sit perched up on that hard chair. Here's Grandma Lane's little rocker that she certainly hasn't any use for while she's asleep, and I'll help myself to this big one out of the sitting room. We might as well be comfortable. And here's a bag of candy," he went on, drawing it from his jacket-pocket. "I got it for you the other evening when I took my lesson."

"Now we're all ready to begin," said Doris, as she settled herself in the rocker, and Kelsey had drawn his own chair by the sunny southern window. "This isn't very bad punishment, after all," helping herself to one of the caramels and shoving the bag along the table to where Kelsey could reach it too. Kelsey began the story and it was not many minutes before the gentle "Wizard of the North" held them both under the power of his enchantment.

After an hour Grandma came down with a book of sermons that she always read on Sunday afternoons. "No, keep the chair," she said as Doris rose quickly, scattering buttons from the table to the stove. "I'll set in the other room. That's my darnin' chair, an' my potato-peelin' chair, an' I see enough of it all the week. When I git tired of readin' I'll watch out for the folks an' tell ye they're comin'."

"They won't get back much before dark," said Kelsey, "for Mr. Wilde said he wanted to see Mr. Burrows on the road to North Kent."

"O, Kelsey," said Doris, "I do so want to know what comes next."

She had paused with her needle in the air, while Arthur Philipppson made his precarious way along the narrow ledge of the precipice, and now that he hung between heaven and earth on the decayed trunk of an old tree with an Alpine vulture regarding him with mortuary interest from a crag near by, she could hardly breathe between hope and fear.

"Don't forget those buttons, Doris," said Kelsey. "Everything is coming out just fine."

Then, as if in answer to Arthur's prayer to the Virgin, Anne of Geierstein, calm, strong, and compassionate, emerged from the mist. Kelsey read on until Doris, glancing at the clock, said, "It is really time to put on the tea-kettle and set

the table. I've had a splendid time. Thank you so much."

"There's this about Scott," said Kelsey, enthusiastically, "one can't read him without wanting to be brave, and true, and unselfish, and clean through and through. His very last words when he was dying were, 'Be good, my dear, be good.' Now, you, see, I have yet a whole hour in which to run down to Kent, little girl. I'll leave the book in your care, for perhaps before Mrs. Wilde gets back you will have time to read some more."

Half an hour later Mr. Wilde and Aurelia returned without Mrs. Wilde. "You see," said Thaddeus to Grandma, "Edson Burrows's wife was feelin' sorter under the weather when we got there, an' a little later she was took awful bad with one of her faintin' fits, an' Edson says it's her heart. She went from one into another, an' Edson had to go to Kent for a doctor, an' telegraph fer her sister to come in the mornin'. There ain't no woman in the house except a green Danish girl that don't know no English, an' there wasn't anything to be done but for Gale to stay all night an' look after things. She probably won't come home until the sister gets there."

Aurelia was hungry and sleepy from her long drive in the cold, and wanted to go right to bed. She was still cross with Doris, and did not ask for a story. Grandma insisted on helping with

the supper dishes, so Doris had an evening under the lamp, and an opportunity to read several chapters in the fascinating book. As she went to bed and thought over the day, she felt very grateful for all that it had brought her. And there were certainly next Saturday afternoon and Sunday to look forward to all the week. "I hope it isn't wicked," she said to herself as she took off the dingy plaid dress with its startling new front breadth, and laid it over a chair for the night, "to wish I had a nicer dress to wear up to the Ridge."

The dress was one that had been brought to her the spring before by a deaconess in New York, who was distributing a quantity of cast-off clothing. There was ink on the front breadth, and after coming to the Wildes' a hot coal had burned a hole as an additional decoration. Unfortunately, the plaid was of a standard pattern, and Mrs. Wilde had been able to match the goods in Kent. "It doesn't seem to me," went on Doris, "that a dress like that really belongs in the beautiful House of Love, not for very bestest, anyhow. God must have plenty of nice clothes in little girls' sizes, whole trunks full. I know he'll send me one, too. Mother said I am his little girl, and rich people always want their children to look nice."

There was no difficulty at all the next morning

in the way of sending Doris to the store, for Grandma was quite out of peppermint drops, and there was nobody at home to suggest that she could wait until another time. Consequently, Doris appeared at the house of Miss Graves, and received a very cordial welcome.

"Was Mrs. Wilde angry yesterday because I carried you off?" she asked.

"She was real disappointed not to get to church," said Doris.

"Did she do anything to you?" went on Miss Graves. Doris smiled as she recalled her pleasant Sunday afternoon.

"She went away right after dinner," said Doris, "and hasn't come home yet. Somebody's ill."

"O, yes, I know," said Miss Graves; "it's Jennie Burrows. She's worse this morning. 'Lias Smith was in for mail and told me. Now take off your coat."

Doris obeyed wonderingly, while Miss Annet took a tape-measure from her workbasket and began carefully to take the length of her skirt, which she wrote down on a slip of paper. "It'll bear just another half-inch," she said, proceeding with the other measurements. "You needn't ask any questions. Somebody just your age and height is going to have a new dress. The stuff will be here this afternoon, and I want you again to-morrow morning."

"I'm afraid I can't get away," said Doris.

"Tell Grandma Lane I want you and she will manage somehow. Perhaps Abigail Wilde won't be back. Now sit down again. You can stay long enough to eat this nice big orange."

Oranges at the Wildes' appeared only on Aurelia's table. Doris had had very few in her whole life. "This makes me think," she said, "of last Christmas. The deaconess brought my mother and me a basket with butter and eggs and a roasted chicken and six big oranges. I was so sorry that my mother did not like the oranges."

"I thought everybody liked them," said Miss Graves.

"Well, she said she really did not care for any," said Doris, "and that I must have one every day for six days. I used to beg her just to taste of one and perhaps she would find she liked it, after all. So one day she did take a tiny piece to please me, but she shook her head and said, 'No, dear, it doesn't appeal to me at all.' And they were just like this," went on Doris, "big and sweet and juicy."

There were tears in Miss Graves's kind blue eyes, but Doris did not see them. Shortly after she had left, Silas and Pepper came along with the noon mail from Kent. Aside from the mail sack, Silas handed to Miss Graves a brown paper

parcel forwarded from a dry-goods shop in response to an order sent down by him that morning by Mrs. Melden to a saleswoman who had waited on her for several years. The parcel contained several yards of fine, soft Gobelin-blue cashmere with silk for feather-stitching and for sewing, and two yards of wide ribbon the very same shade for somebody's hair.

"I'll buy the goods if you'll make the dress," Mrs. Melden had said on Sunday.

"And you must manage about that cantata," said Miss Graves. "I won't appear on the scene next time."

"I'll take Gladys Courtney," said the first conspirator.

Miss Graves spent a busy afternoon cutting and basting. Mrs. Wilde did not get home until the next noon, quite after Doris had been fitted to the pretty cashmere. Mrs. Melden brought the package with her to the Wildes' when she came to call two days later. Mrs. Wilde was in rather a subdued frame of mind. She had seen Jennie Burrows go very near to the river of death. But here was the Melden sleigh again, and—could she believe her eyes?—not only Mrs. Melden but Miss Courtney, whose mother was a straight Waverley, and who was at the very topmost notch of the Ridge society.

"For the land's sake!" she exclaimed. "Mar,

just look at them furs, will you? I s'pose she's noticed 'Reely too, and wants her for something or other."

Doris opened the front door this time without a mishap, as the lock had been oiled, and returned the greeting of the ladies modestly but with the rare smile of which she was quite unconscious.

After the usual preliminary remarks on the good sleighing and bright weather, Miss Courtney proceeded straight to the matter on hand.

"We are arranging," she said, "for our Christmas cantata to be given in the hall on Christmas Eve. It is to be a very beautiful production. My sister, Miss Vida Courtney, has written the words, and Mr. Melden has composed the music. There are a few tableaux to be interspersed with the scenes, and we need a small group of angels, and have come to ask if your daughter may be one of them. There will, of course, be several extra rehearsals besides those on Saturday afternoons, but if you can send the two girls up by Silas Webb, when he brings the evening mail from Kent, we will among us see that they are sent home safely about nine o'clock on such evenings as we are obliged to rehearse."

"The two girls?" repeated Mrs. Wilde. "You surely don't want Doris Avery for an angel."

"We have assigned another part to Doris,"

said Mrs. Melden, "as she is a member of our chorus choir, of the juvenile portion, of course. There are no others in the cantata outside of the senior, intermediate, and junior choirs. Each one must be in his or her place."

Mrs. Wilde longed to disapprove openly, but for Aurelia's sake she could not afford to displease these Ridge ladies. "You know," she said, "that Doris Avery is no relation of ours."

"Do you know anything of her parentage, Mrs. Wilde?" inquired Miss Courtney.

"Nothing much," replied Mrs. Wilde. "My husband has a sort of distant cousin down in New York, and I wrote to her for some one to help. This child's mother had just died, and some people had taken her in for a few days. The mother had a good reputation and sewed for a living. They were dreadfully poor."

"May I speak with Doris?" said Miss Courtney, blandly.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Wilde, smiling frostily and raging within as she rose to call Doris, who came into the room and stood timidly near the door.

"Come here, my dear," said Miss Courtney. "I have brought you the words you are to sing in the cantata. Mrs. Wilde has kindly consented to allow you to come up to rehearsals with Aurelia, who is going to be an angel. These are your lines,

and I hope you will have them memorized by Saturday. Now go and speak with Mrs. Melden. Mrs. Wilde, may your daughter come here a moment?"

Aurelia was hustled into a clean ruffled apron and duly produced. Her waving hair fell in a loose mass almost to her waist. "Yes," said Miss Courtney, sitting with her head on one side and turning Aurelia partly around, "you are exactly what we need. Just raise your hands a bit—so. Now look up! That is excellent. We may depend on her, may we not, Mrs. Wilde?"

"I guess she can get there all right," responded Abigail, her gratified pride for the moment surmounting all other emotions.

The ladies rose to leave, and Mrs. Melden extended the paper parcel toward Mrs. Wilde, saying, graciously: "We know what it means, Mrs. Wilde, for a very busy woman like yourself to take a little girl whom you must necessarily clothe for the winter. Some of us have hoped to assist you in the good work, and we trust you will accept for Doris this dress, which we will be pleased to see her wear when she comes to rehearsals and on Sundays. Her costumes in the cantata will be provided. The committee arranges for all the costumes."

"Thank you, ma'am, I'm sure," said Mrs. Wilde, grasping the parcel and wishing it were a

chicken that she might wring its neck. "Thank you. You are very thoughtful."

To think that she had to take it, that she had to look pleased, that she had to give it to Doris! Doris gave the ladies a look that was more than any speech, for it was veiled by grateful tears. As they drove away, Miss Courtney said, thoughtfully: "My dear Isabel, that is a far from ordinary child, and, what is more, I have seen her face somewhere. If it were not for the freckles, and her face had matured a little more, she would certainly be beautiful."

"She has such charming manners," said Mrs. Melden. "My children can hardly wait for her to come again and tell them another story."

"But where have I seen that face?" mused Miss Courtney.

"Now, that you speak of it," said Mrs. Melden, "it seems familiar to me also."

"Aren't we a couple of born diplomats?" laughed Miss Courtney, giving over her quest in memory's dusty attic. "Couldn't we give sops to old Cerberus himself?"

"But I fear that the poor child has to work doubly hard to earn her little outings. Miss Graves is sure it is so, although she cannot induce her to complain of anything," said Mrs. Melden.

"We will try and make the outings doubly pleasant then," said Miss Courtney, as they waved

and nodded smilingly to their fellow-conspirator, Miss Graves, who was waiting in a front window of her house when they came by.

Mrs. Wilde had jerked open the parcel before the ladies were out of sight. The soft pretty blue dress and wide, generous lengths of hair-ribbon slipped to the floor in her haste. "You run along, Doris Avery!" she said. "You'll get all this finery when I see fit to give it to you. How ever could they guess your size? See, mar, the idea of buyin' such goods an' such ribbons for a charity youngun'!"

Aurelia here seized on the gift, crying, "It's prettier than mine, lots prettier," and made as if she would throw the daintily made garment toward the coal-hod. For an instant Doris wanted to cry out in protest, but immediately she realized that no one would dare to injure the gift of the Ridge ladies, and that her beautiful present was safe. How she longed to gather it carefully into her own arms and carry it up to her little room, and bury her face in the fine folds, letting the silky stream of glistening ribbon run through her fingers in an ecstasy of possession! But here Abigail had her opportunity to thwart and annoy, and she bore away the treasured present into the abandoned parlor and coming away locked the door and put the key in her pocket. But Doris reveled in the sense that the

things were really hers, and in the cold and darkness of the stiff country parlor they seemed to glow with a beauty quite beyond their own quiet charm. It was a comfort that Grandma knew, and was glad too; and that night when the stairs were climbed for the last time until the next day brought its repeated duties, Grandma came and sat on Doris's bed and they talked it all over in the dark with bated breath.

"I was thinking only Sunday night," whispered Doris, "that my plaid dress wasn't good enough to wear in the House of Love, not for very best, anyhow. And here it's only Thursday, and, just think, Grandma, what's down in the parlor! I know that there's surprises and surprises in God's beautiful house."

"But you see, dear," said Grandma, patting the small hand in the six and three-quarter white kid glove, "the ladies must have planned to buy and make the dress before you asked the Lord for it."

"Now that's the beauty of it," exclaimed Doris, raising up on one elbow, "for it shows that just the needing of something sounds to God very much like asking."

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. WILDE'S DISCOVERY

WHEN Saturday came Doris was allowed to have her new dress about an hour before the time to start. "How they could ever have got that shade of blue for a fright like you," said Abigail, sourly, as she handed the dress and ribbons to their owner, "is beyond me."

But the choice had been wisely made, for the particular shade of the cloth and the ribbons seemed to bring out the tints of the child's hair and the ever-changing color of her eyes. Doris had been called earlier than usual that morning and had been kept busy every minute with dish-cloth and broom, scrubbing-brush and duster, knife and mop. She was too happy to know she was tired, and the knowledge that with the exception of her shoes she was neatly dressed buoyed up her spirits to concert pitch. Grandma hooked her up, rather slowly and fumblingly, but none the less kindly. "It seems to me, Doris," she said, "that them shoes warn't ever made to go with a dress like this."

"I know they weren't, Grandma, dear, and you

mustn't be surprised to see me with a much nicer pair."

As Kelsey drove along with the girls Miss Graves was at her window beckoning vigorously. She ran out the front door with her apron over her head, bringing a neat black tam, and saying, "Leave your hat here with me, Doris, and wear this. It will keep the cold out from your neck and ears."

But Doris knew that there was another reason for the gift of the cap. Many of the girls in the choir wore them that winter. "I have on my beautiful new dress, Miss Graves," said Doris.

"Well, I hope, child, you will always be happy in it. Good-by."

"It isn't any fun having my picture painted," pouted Aurelia. "I dread it. You have a much nicer time than me."

"O, don't say 'me,' " said Kelsey; "say 'I.' "

"You needn't talk to Doris and I, Kelsey Starr," said Aurelia, haughtily.

"Don't say 'I'; say 'me,' " laughed Kelsey.

"O, Kelsey," broke in Doris, "that makes me think about something in Aurelia's—"

"Miss Aurelia's," corrected that young lady.

"Well, Miss Aurelia's, then," went on Doris, smilingly, "Miss Aurelia's grammar lesson for Monday. I couldn't find the answer to the question."

Kelsey was able to explain the difficulty to Doris, but could not penetrate Aurelia's dull understanding. The fact was more and more apparent to Miss Turner as the lessons went on that Aurelia was undeniably dense and unpromising. The paper dolls and glass beads had worked for a week or two, but soon lost their charm. The prospect grew daily more dubious. If it were not for what Doris was learning from the questions that Miss Turner wrote out patiently week after week, the latter would have felt that she could not keep on. But of this more later.

Doris had no time to stop at the Meldens' on account of her private lesson with Miss Courtney, which she enjoyed immensely, and the music of the cantata had to be gone over, besides the regular work for Sunday, so she was only just in time for the nursery tea, and the Melden children were so disappointed that their mother said, "Perhaps to-morrow Mrs. Wilde will allow Doris to spend the afternoon with us," and she wrote a note to that effect to send by the two girls when they went home.

It included this sentence: "I know so well of all days in the week a mother wishes her family circle unbroken on Sunday, so I cannot think of asking for the loan of your little daughter on that day. But, Doris, I am sure, has not been so long with you as to seem one with you, so please

be prepared to see her captured by the Melden family at the close of the morning service. We will send her home all right after supper."

Mrs. Wilde stormed over the note. "She needn't take it for granted," she said, "that I couldn't part with 'Reely on a Sunday. She might have waited till she'd asked and found out! Doris, you can't go, you shan't go, not one step, do you hear me?"

Doris happened at that moment to catch a glimpse of Kelsey, who had come up the cellar-stairs and had one hand curled around his ear as if making a most painful attempt to catch some slight sound of the blast, and she bent to pick up a stray pin from the floor, lest Mrs. Wilde should see how unsteady were the corners of her mouth.

"It's too bad you can't go, Doris," said Grandma, when Mrs. Wilde was out looking after her chickens.

"I'd just love to," replied Doris, "but somehow, I don't feel worried about it. In the House of Love, Grandma, you get just everything there is for you; and if you don't get what you want, it is because it isn't yours, and there's something just exactly as good that is yours."

"You're the strangest child with the oldest head that ever I saw," replied Grandma.

The next morning, Mrs. Wilde put on her Sunday clothes as if she were a mediæval knight

donning his coat of mail. She had the air of an armored cruiser as she bore down the walk to the horse-block. There was battle in the air, and she said little. Aurelia was particularly exasperating. "Ain't you sorry you can't go?" she said several times to Doris. The latter was thankful when the church was reached and she could part with the family. It was no longer necessary to try to hide her dress, but she was glad to don the vestments once more and lose herself, as it were, in the service. At the close, when the girls had resumed their coats and hats and returned to join their parents or friends in the church, Mr. Melden said, kindly, to Doris, "I believe you are coming home with us this noon?"

"I would like to very much, Mr. Melden, but I think Mrs. Wilde wishes me to go back with her."

"Nonsense! We'll see about that," he answered. "Here is Miss Courtney, who dines with us to-day also. Gladys, please bring our young friend right along under your wing to my wife, while I speak to Mrs. Wilde."

Abigail had expected to be approached by the ladies of the family, but she had no thought of meeting with the treasurer of the largest stock company in Kent, and as she saw him drawing unmistakably in her direction, her iron resolve weakened, and she cast a glance to one side as if

wishing for the support of Thaddeus, who had already gone to get the horse.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Melden, coming up and extending his hand, "but I believe this is Mrs. Wilde, of Deepfurrow Farm? Yes? I am not mistaken. My wife tells me that you are lending Doris Avery to us this afternoon. Most kind of you, I'm sure, for she has a small solo part in our cantata, and I wish to go over it with her at my leisure." Just then Mrs. Melden, Miss Holcomb, and Miss Courtney came up with Doris, speaking pleasantly to Mrs. Wilde and Aurelia, and being introduced to Grandma Lane, whose days in the Manor House were forgotten, but who, herself, knew every twig and bud and blossom on the Waverley tree. Abigail had mentally composed a brief speech on the way to church, which she had rehearsed several times during the sermon and prayers. She was to hold her head very high, conscious that her Sunday suit was all wool and her hat came from the best milliner in Kent, and she was to say slowly and emphatically, "I thank you very much, Mrs. Melden, but Doris is needed at home this afternoon, and you must kindly excuse her." Then she was to carry off the humbled and disappointed Doris in triumph. At the same time there was the underlying reluctance to displease these people, who had it in their power to open or close doors to Aurelia.

Somewhat flustered by the combined assurance of this group of gentlefolk, and yet determined not to be outgeneraled, she was rallying her determination and taking a firm grip on the back of the next pew, when Thaddeus suddenly reappeared, quite contrary to his custom, and said: "Jacob Binney has just got word through the Stovers that his father ain't so well, and his aunt wants him to come right over to Westbrook before he goes home, and his wife can't go because she left the pork in the oven, and besides it's too far for the two little girls. He wants to know if we can possibly squeeze them into our wagon, and drop them at their house, so long as we always go past that way, and I said that as Doris was probably not goin' home with us this noon, I thought we could manage it all right."

What could Abigail do but to say to Mrs. Melden, with an attempt at a smile, "Well, it seems as if Doris will have to stay behind, after all. I hope she won't put you out."

So Doris remained, and was taken home with the Meldens in silent but amused triumph. Immediately upon their arrival Miss Holcomb, who was a very petite young lady, spirited Doris up to her own room, and produced from a shoe-box a pair of neat kid walking boots but slightly worn. "They are just a little too wide for me," she said, "but are almost new, and I believe you

can wear them nicely. Just try them on, my dear."

They proved to be a very comfortable fit for Doris, and thus it was that when she reappeared in the drawing room, the pretty blue dress was no longer put to shame by the rough calfskin shoes. There was a delicious dinner, through which Doris guided herself successfully by quietly taking Miss Holcomb's lead as to knives, forks, and spoons, and the family drew her into the conversation occasionally in a way to make her feel one with them without singling her out by direct questioning. It was indeed a fact that the child felt more at ease, and conducted herself with far better grace, than when she was passing the plates of food in the Wilde kitchen. The little Melden girls sparkled with delight as they were allowed to sit on either side of Doris.

"O, Doris," said Helen, "we've looked and looked for the Red Dwarf and the gold cup in the nursery fire, and we have not seen them since you were here the other Saturday. We thought we found the dwarf's hut just once, but it looked as if it had been 'most burned down."

"The w'ite kitty wasn't on the doorstep, never, never," said Edwina, consoling herself with strawberry ice cream.

"O, I'm sorry if the good dwarf has lost his pretty house," said Doris; "perhaps you were mis-

taken, after all. Maybe it was the Brown Beetle's cabin that was burned."

"Then p'r'aps you'll find all the things again for us, won't you, Doris?"

"I'll surely try," she replied.

After dinner it was hard to get the children out for their usual Sunday afternoon walk, and only the fact that it was the one day in the week when their father could take them kept them from clamoring to explore again the mysterious land on the nursery hearth. Miss Holcomb and Miss Courtney went upstairs for a confab and a nap, and Miss Courtney said yet again, "Where, O, where have I seen that face? It will surely come back to mind."

Mrs. Melden told Doris that it was her custom to rest a while on the library couch and read after the Sunday dinner until her husband returned with the children, and she gave Doris permission to examine the books of etchings and engravings on the living-room table, and to walk through the conservatory at her leisure. So an hour passed very swiftly, until Mr. Melden and the children came in laughing and talking. Then came the visit to the nursery, while Mr. Melden had his usual nap in his Morris chair, and an hour later began one of the happiest experiences in Doris's life, for in all that the years brought to her of change and sorrow and pleasure she never forgot

that occasion. J. G. Holland once wrote, "O sweet first time of everything good in life!" and this was for Doris the first occasion when she tasted the delight of music in a cultured family group. For a background there was the soft-toned, luxurious harmony of the living-room itself, the afternoon sun streaming unforbidden through the wide windows with their curtains of delicate cream-tinted net and golden-brown silk, the exact shade of the wall decoration. Several rich rugs in subdued colors, from a far land that had centuries since sent the product of its looms by camel train to tent of Arabian sheik or Egyptian palaces, revealed between their edges spaces of polished floor. Before the fireplace of rough-hewn stone, where a huge pine log was blazing, lay a magnificent brown bearskin, with whose great head baby hands were now free to play, thrusting small, gleeful fingers between the ferocious-looking teeth.

There was a wide couch also in golden brown, heaped with pillows in varying shades of the same color, among which was the glint of one of yellow silk, and the relieving note of a dull-blue tapestry. The books of the library had overflowed here on a few long, low shelves, and the few large photographs in their simple frames of dark oak were not too closely hung to deprive each of its full effectiveness. The room was de-

signed for constant use and comfort. To-day there were fresh yellow carnations in the tall glass, and they seemed like a votive offering to a finely carved Nuremberg Madonna that stood on her pedestal of wood near by, the original of which in delicate grace and tender pathos is one of the joys of the world. Above her in her corner hung a Nuremberg lantern of iron curiously wrought, framing ovals of amber glass. There were no chairs with spidery, impossible legs, inviting disaster, but all were evidently built to companion an interesting book, or rest a weary head. At one end of the room stood a grand piano. Here Mr. Melden took his accustomed place, playing from memory from the masters, sometimes singing a duet with Miss Courtney or playing the accompaniment to her high soprano, as they turned the leaves of the "Messiah," selecting here and there a beloved bit. Doris sat rapt, enchanted, alight with a hitherto untasted happiness. Then, after an hour, Mr. Melden took up the Christmas cantata with Miss Courtney and Miss Holcomb, who drew Doris almost unconsciously to herself to the piano, and made her so entirely a part of the little group and the music that she was able to overcome all shyness and to sing the part assigned to her with sweetness and expression. It was the part of a child who visits, with other members of her family, a destitute

mother and children on Christmas Eve. As she sang, the two young ladies exchanged looks of surprise and pleasure with Mrs. Melden; and as Miss Courtney watched the girl's face, the recurring perplexity entered her mind. "I had never seen her until week before last, but her face is familiar."

After supper, Mrs. Melden ordered the sleigh, and as it was a beautiful moonlight night, the young ladies insisted on going home with Doris. Nestled between them on the wide seat, with one hand in Miss Holcomb's muff and the other in Miss Courtney's, Doris had never felt so at home in the world before.

"Doris," said Miss Courtney, "do you know your mother's people at all?"

"She hadn't anybody left, Miss Courtney," replied Doris, "and my father was an only child, who died soon after I was born. Mother had promised that when I was older she would tell me a long and interesting story about our people, but she sickened and died very suddenly. She died in the hospital in her sleep, they told me."

Miss Courtney tightened her clasp on the hand, as Doris ended with a sound of tears in her voice. "But have you nothing that was hers, dear?" went on her new friend.

"I have a Bible," replied Doris. "It is rather

fine print, and the cover is quite worn, but I love it the most of anything in the world."

"And is there no name in it?" continued Miss Courtney.

"There is a name on one of the blank leaves," said Doris, "but the ink is so faded I have never been able to quite make it out. 'All I can read is, 'her booke,' and under it, 'looke,' both of the words spelled with an 'e.' My mother had the Bible from her mother, who had it from her grandmother. I can make out '1800' all right."

"Doris," said Miss Courtney, with great earnestness, "will you bring me this Bible next Saturday?"

"Certainly, Miss Courtney."

But there were very sufficient reasons why Doris was not able to keep her word.

When the Wildes had returned home from church that noon without her, Mrs. Wilde was consuming with anger that her plan had been balked. Her unreasonable hate of the orphan child was at white heat. Aurelia, who had seen enough of the Melden house to know what Doris would have to enjoy all the afternoon, shared in her mother's indignant protest, and would be by no means an easy proposition to administer between dinner and dusk. After the kitchen work was done, Grandma having performed her share

with unusual cheerfulness and animation, Mrs. Wilde took it into her head to go up and inspect Doris's little room. It was perfectly neat. Her belongings were too few to cause any disorder. Happily, the old white kid gloves with which she protected her hands at night were tucked safely under the bureau. The room was just as it was the night she first came, except for two or three pictures from an old magazine that Kelsey Starr had given her, and which she had pinned to the bare wall. The old Bible lay on the window sill. Mrs. Wilde picked it up for the first time. "The pious little lamb-faced beggar!" she said to herself, opening the book and casually turning the leaves. On one of the fly leaves something caught her eye. It was the faded brown writing nearly obliterated except for "her booke" and "looke" and the year "1800." Doris would not be back for hours. She took the book under her arm and went downstairs and out to the hothouse, where, in the little office where Thaddeus kept his desk and agricultural catalogues and papers, she knew there was a powerful magnifying glass. Thaddeus was comfortably dozing behind the county weekly in the sitting-room. There was nobody around. Mrs. Wilde sat down on the high wooden stool before the desk, laid down the Bible and opened it to the mysterious page. Then drawing the treasured glass from its chamois case

she held it over the indistinct lines. The glass, like a keen detective, dragged the words from the dim hiding place of the yellow leaf, and with drawn brows and sharp, eager eyes, Abigail Wilde read clearly as follows:

"Doris Thorne, *née* Lady Clifford, to her beloved daughter, Agnes."

Then followed in another handwriting, almost illegible even to the glass:

"Agnes Thorne, her booke,
The Lord from heaven on her lookc. May 10, 1800."

Mrs. Wilde drew a writing-pad toward her and copied the words with pen and ink. She looked startled and greatly puzzled. Something in her memory had stirred at the name of Lady Clifford. It seemed to belong to her days of Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen. She carefully replaced the glass, and picking up the Bible and the piece of paper, she started for the house. The paper fell from her fingers while she was latching the door of the hothouse, and a sudden gust of wind blew it far aloft and whirled it away out of sight and reach. But the words were burned into her brain. She went upstairs, passed softly through Grandma's room, where the latter was sleeping, and replaced the Bible where she had found it. Then she went down to the sitting

room, shook the fire, put on more coal, and sank heavily into her rocker, but not to read. Her thoughts were too busy peering into the dim recesses of her memory for old records. At last, when Grandma had finished her nap and put in an appearance, Abigail inquired, suddenly, "Mar, did you ever hear of anybody by the name of Clifford?"

"What's that, Gale? Clifford—Clifford," she repeated slowly, polishing her spectacles. "I dunno, I really dunno's I ever heerd the name, Gale."

"Now, just think hard, mar. I can almost remember that when I was a little girl you told me something or other about that name. It had something to do with the Ridge, I'm sure."

"Lemme think," said Grandma, "lemme think a bit." There was a long pause.

"Clifford, Clifford," resumed Grandma. "Yes, it does sorter come back to me now. It hed suthin' to do with the Manor House."

Grandma's face began to brighten. "What was the fust name, Gale?"

"Doris," replied Mrs. Wilde, shortly.

"Now I know why there was suthin' familiar-like about the little Avery girl's name. Yes, I remember what it was. It warn't in my time, though. My grandmother told me. She was an upstairs maid at the big house in those days. The

Madam in the Manor at that time was very young and lively as a bird. Mr. Gramerton Waverley, her husband, had gone over to England after her, and she pined a bit for her old friends in the mother country. So he sent for her dearest friend to come over for a year and be company for her until she sorter got used to the strange land and new faces. The friend's name was Lady Doris Clifford. Why, Gale, what ever made you jump so sudden!"

"O, nothing," said Abigail. "I only hit my hand on the stove. Do go on!"

"Yes, it all comes back to me now," continued Grandma, with the delight in which one shakes out an old ball-gown long packed away. "The story made a lot of talk at the time, my grandmother said."

"Well, never mind that," said Abigail, impatiently; "tell me about it."

"Wal, the Lady Doris Clifford was a great beauty an' she was highly connected, and her people were very rich. Her people had some plan for her to marry somebody they had picked out for her. It was some arrangement that was goin' to add property to property. She wasn't in love with the man. She was young an' didn't know what love really was, and she wanted to please her family, an' the Waverleys as well, and it was all arranged that her brother and this man were

to come over to America after her at the end of the year, and she was to marry him soon after they got back to old England. Those were gay days at the Manor House, so my mother said. The Waverleys, for the most part, have been steady, God-fearin' people, but that generation raised the dickens. It was the young madam principally who set the pace. There warn't nothin' bad about her, except that she was awful frivolous and vain, and allus wanted a lot goin' on, an' there was no end to balls an' theatricals an' big dinners an' often too much wine. Lady Clifford was nip an' tuck with Madam Waverley. O, it all does come back to me so clear now, jest as my grandmother told it."

"Well?" said Abigail, breathlessly.

"Wal, one day a strange man came to the Green. Nobody knew who he was. He took his stand under that big oak at the northeast corner near the iron gate of the Manor grounds, and took off his hat and began to sing. He had a great voice like a church organ. The young madam and Lady Clifford were walkin' down the gravel path toward the street, and they stopped to listen. All the people who were passing by stopped, those in the waggins an' those on foot. Some giggled and made remarks, but the most of 'em stood stock still right in their tracks. My grandmother was young then herself, but she

never forgot that day, nor the words the man sang, for afterwards she came across 'em in some singing-book. The words was:

“The voice of free grace cries ‘Escape to the mountain,
For Adam’s lost race Christ has opened a fountain.
For sin and uncleanness and every transgression,
His blood flows most freely in streams of salvation.’

It warn’t so much the words nor the tune, my grandmother said. It was the man himself. His face was like as if there was sunshine inside of him. When he had sung, he opened a little Bible and read one verse. ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’ People had come running out of their houses. Madam and Lady Clifford were keeping close behind the hedge, where they could hear. And sech a sermon warn’t never heerd on the Ridge before nor sence. It warn’t long, but tears were runnin’ down people’s faces, as he begged them to turn from their idols an’ follow Jesus Christ. The Madam listened with her nose in the air, but Lady Clifford had turned very pale and looked down. When the preacher finished he made a very short prayer, and turned to pick up his hat, and the blacksmith stepped up and asked him to dinner to his house. People crowded around him and asked questions, and Madam was so curious she told my mother to go and find out who the man was. She came back in a few moments and

said that he was what they call a Methodist preacher, some new sect that was much looked down on, and that he had so turned the heads of some of the village people that they wanted him to speak again, and as it was pleasant summer weather, the blacksmith said that there could be another meeting that night in the field back of his house. Wal, to make a long story short, when evenin' come there was a crowd of all sorts. an' Lady Doris Clifford was there wrapped in a long black cloak, an' cryin' as if her heart would break. They hed fixed up a bench near the preacher, an' when he asked those who wanted to be saved from their sins to come forward an' kneel, Lady Clifford went. The Methodists were just startin' in in Kent, and some of 'em were there at the blacksmith's meeting. They were much despised in those days by the other churches, but they seemed to have somethin' that made them very happy. They called it 'the Witness,' though I never knew what it was. But, whatever it was, Lady Clifford got it that very night, and they said her face was like an angel's, and she turned and spoke to the crowd most beautiful. And just then the Congregational parson an' the Episcopal rector came upon the scene with the constable, an' they sed the whole business was out of order an' had got to stop, an' the preacher couldn't stay in the town another hour. So he

went down to Kent, walked down, with the few Methodists from there, and they sang all the way."

"But what about that crazy Clifford woman?" asked Abigail.

"Well, her troubles begun that night. Mr. Gramerton Waverley and the Madam raved an' stormed. You see, my grandmother was right there in the upper rooms an' heard it all. But they couldn't do anything with Lady Clifford. She was firm as a rock, an' when Sunday come she hired somebody to take her down to Kent to the Methodist service, when the Waverleys wouldn't give her as much as a spoke in a waggin wheel to get there. Things got so bad that Lady Clifford couldn't stand it any longer, and she went down to Kent an' stayed with some woman who was a Methodist. She wanted to get back to England and tell her people. She thought perhaps she could win over her father and mother. She sold her pearls and bought her passage back, but before that she was some weeks among the Methodists in New York, and married one of their preachers, and they went back to her parents. All my mother ever knew after that was that her family turned her off and disinherited her, and she traveled a great deal with her husband, singin' an' speakin' an' bringin' many people into the sect. Her husband also had been cast out by his family.

His father was a professor in Cambridge University, and his mother was a lord's daughter, and the Methodists was looked down on in them days."

When Grandma had finished her story, Abigail arose and went upstairs. She was very white and her eyes blazed. She went straight to the room of Doris, carefully tore the written leaf from the Bible, came down again, and, lifting a lid on the kitchen stove, laid the page on the red coals, and stood watching it burn.

"She shall never know," she said, grimly, "and they shall never know!"

That night at bedtime Grandma heard about the heavenly afternoon at the Ridge. "And look, Grandma," said Doris, pointing to the new shoes.

"Wal, I never!" exclaimed Grandma; "where'd they come from?"

"They were in a cupboard in the House of Love," laughed Doris, softly.

Doris was sadly puzzled the next day when she missed the mysterious fly-leaf from her Bible, but she had not looked at it for a long time, and thought perhaps her mother might have torn it out for some purpose of her own.

CHAPTER IX

THE TURQUOISE RING

ABOUT a week before Christmas Doris appeared half-breathless and much excited at Miss Graves's side door.

"O, Miss Graves!" she exclaimed, "I haven't a minute, for Mrs. Wilde sent me to the store, and I'm saving time to speak to you by running down and back."

"But you must come in, even for that fifty-nine seconds," replied Miss Graves, drawing her into the house. "What is it, my dear?"

Doris was fumbling in her coat pocket, and produced a very small wad of brown paper, which she thrust into Miss Graves's hand, saying, "You know it's almost Christmas, and I want to give everybody at the house a present, but I haven't any money, and if I had I can't go down to the stores, you know, and I wondered if you wouldn't know somebody who would buy my little ring? It's all the jewelry I have, and I think it must be worth perhaps five dollars."

Miss Graves opened the little packet and examined the ring with great seriousness. It was

made of gold and set with one small turquoise, and probably cost when it was new a dollar and a half. "Where did you get it, my dear?" she asked, kindly.

"Two or three years ago," answered Doris, "my mother took me once on a boat for a long ride. Somebody gave her tickets for us, and we spent the day on the shore, where the waves kept coming up, and I dug a well in the sand for the waves to fill, and I found this ring in the sand. We did not know what to do with it, for there is a crowd of different people at that beach every day, and the ring must have been there a long time, for it was quite deeply buried. It was too large for me then, but a year ago my mother found I could wear it to always remember that one day we had together by the ocean. She said the blue stone would always remind me of the color of the sky and the sea that day."

"So you must be very fond of it," said Miss Graves, still looking down at the ring.

"I don't want to think about that part of it," said Doris, the quick tears springing to her eager eyes. "It meant that day to me, you know, but nothing can change that nor take it away from me. We had it together. But I can't bear not to have anything to give, dear Miss Graves. I don't like to bother you, but do you s'pose you can sell it?"

"I can dispose of it all right," replied Miss Graves, "I think, for five dollars. Perhaps we can manage somehow or other to have you go along down to Kent with me and see the Christmas things and do your own shopping."

"How splendid!" cried Doris.

"I'll invite Grandma Lane for a sleighride; she doesn't get out very often. You tell Mrs. Wilde I brought you in and sent word that I will call after Grandma to-morrow afternoon. We'll work you in too, I hope, somehow."

Mrs. Wilde was quite pleased with the invitation to Grandma, especially when she saw the almost childish delight that brightened the dim old eyes. Then, too, she was too busy herself to get off the next day and procure some articles at Kent that she very much needed. Grandma seldom had a bit of cash in her shabby purse, and Abigail, with a sudden premonition that touched her heart in an unsuspected tender spot, when she gave her a short written list and the necessary money to pay for the things, added a dollar, saying:

"You may want to buy something for yourself, mar. You haven't been to town for an age."

Abigail did not know then that she had planted the seed of the sweet, white flower of a comforting memory that would bloom when the wrinkled old hands were folded away and the quavering

voice was heard no more. O, the gardens of the future that we are all sowing every day! And it will not make the thorns less sharp when we think that but for our blind selfishness they might have been lilies.

Grandma was almost too happy to sleep that night. She had a dollar of her own to spend for Christmas! Doris had confided to her during their usual bedtime talk that Miss Graves was going to try to take her along. "She'll do it somehow," said Grandma. "She's a dabster."

And she did do it, for the afternoon of the day she had taken the turquoise ring into her charge, she drove to the Ridge and from there to Kent, and the result of her work seemed to please her, for after her return in the twilight, while the wood crackled merrily beneath the shining tea-kettle as a prelude to the song of the boiling water, she stepped from pantry to table and table to pantry to the tune of the obligato of an old Christmas anthem that she had sung in the choir when her cheeks were as pink as those of her supplanter.

That evening when Kelsey called for the weekly paper she had a note ready for Mrs. Wilde, in which she stated that she had been in Kent that day, and that Aurelia's teacher had seen her and asked her to kindly inform Mrs. Wilde that it would not be convenient for her to

get to the farm the next day, but would Mrs. Wilde send Aurelia down to Kent for the lessons, and let her stay to supper after them, and also remain over night to go to a stereopticon show in the town hall? Doris would have to come in to get certain explanations about the arithmetic questions, but, of course, that would not keep her long. Miss Turner had been hoping to give Aurelia a little treat, and this seemed to be just the right time for it. Miss Turner would send Aurelia home the next morning.

Mrs. Wilde read the note aloud. "Well, I must say," she remarked at the end of it, "everything seems to fit in this time for once, Miss Graves wanting to go down and take mar when I need things, and Aurelia having a fine time without Doris tagging along. Doris, you understand that you ain't invited to stay to the Turners, not even to take your hat off. You have just to hear what Miss Turner has to say to you, and go right about your business. I would scarcely think it worth while for you to go, only that mar will have a lot of parcels, and it won't do to leave 'em in the sleigh between goin' from one store to another. You'll have a splendid time, Aurelia."

Doris, far from being consumed by the jealousy which Mrs. Wilde had hoped to awaken in her breast, hugged herself behind the pantry door, and only by a powerful effort at self-control pre-

vented herself from springing out and hugging Grandma Lane when she passed by her. Grandma was smiling over the doughnuts she was mixing. She saw the hand of Miss Graves in the way things had "fit in," and when Abigail had disappeared to make sure that Aurelia's Sunday dress was in perfect order, she said to Doris, "Didn't I tell you Annet Graves is a dabster?"

"What's that, Grandma? An angel without feathers?"

"Laws no, child! It's a person there ain't no gettin' ahead of."

Ever since Doris had practically sold her ring she had been preparing a list on a discarded brown paper bag of the things she would buy for the family and Miss Graves. It troubled her much that she could not consult some one, as she was quite uncertain as to prices. Poor little girl! She had never had even a quarter of a dollar all at once, and the five dollars seemed like a fathomless mine of riches. At present her list read thus:

"WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO BUY

"1. For Grandma—One set of mink furs and a rocking chair with stuffing.

"2. For Kelsey—Shakespeare's Complete Works bound in leather.

"3. For Mr. Wilde—Felt slippers.

"4. For Mrs. Wilde—Silver-handled umbrella.

"5. For Aurelia—A gold ring.

"6. For the hired men—will decide later.

"7. For Miss Graves—Shopping bag like Miss Courtney's, with things inside."

Perhaps if there were anything left of the five dollars, she could buy Grandma a hot-water bag to use instead of the stone vinegar jug she took to bed with her every night. Doris pored over this list in her mind hour after hour, sometimes wavering between the silk umbrella and a gold brooch, sometimes changing Mr. Wilde's slippers for a fur cap, or the leather-bound Shakespeare for an overcoat. In her nature there was no bit-terness, and the spirit of the Christmastide filled her with a desire to make everybody happy.

When the party started off the next afternoon Doris sat on the front seat with Miss Graves, for Aurelia shared the back seat with Grandma. The jingling bells kept the conversation from becoming general, and after a little Doris timidly produced her precious shopping list, and held it out to Miss Graves, saying, "Please, will you take a peep at this? Only not at the end where it's turned under, you know, 'cause that's a surprise. O, I'm so happy!"

Miss Graves took the two reins in her right hand, and the piece of brown paper in her left, and glanced down the list. She handed it back rather abruptly to Doris. The road was narrow just here, and a loaded team was approaching,

and Miss Graves had to turn out, which gave her a seemingly necessary opportunity to draw her handkerchief out from the cuff of her sleeve and polish her glasses. She started to speak once or twice to Doris, but only succeeded in ejaculating that bit of New England vernacular, "Geddap!" as she turned her horse back into the beaten track. At last she swallowed forcibly, and said in a low tone not audible at the rear: "You dear child! I hate to tell you, but the things you've written on that paper would cost many times five dollars. You'll have to make it all over, Doris."

A shadow fell across the eager face beside her. "Now don't you go to feeling bad and upset, little girl," went on Miss Graves. "It's heart that really counts, and the love and good will in yours doesn't go for nothing; it makes the whole world brighter, even if you don't know it. When we've left Aurelia with Miss Turner, you and I'll have a chance to go over that list together."

It took time and strategy to secure this opportunity. Aurelia had no mind to be deposited at Miss Turner's door until she had driven up and down the whole length of Main Street, and had selected the most dazzling shop in which to spend the three dollars she had accumulated in her china pig-bank during the year. Grandma Lane wanted to see if the cottage where she first went to house-keeping was still standing on Willow Street. The

very few times she had ever been brought to Kent with Gale, the latter never had a minute to spare for "gallivantin'," and Miss Graves was determined that Grandma should "gallivant" to her heart's content. They found a steam laundry on the site of the small white house of Grandma's fondest memory. The old lady sank back in the sleigh with a little sigh.

"Is there any other place you want to go, Grandma?" asked Miss Graves.

"Yes, Annet; if it ain't too much trouble, I'd like to look up the Widder Lines, she that was a Jenkins. She's livin' with her son and his family; been bedridden for several years. We were great friends, but we ain't met since Gale was married."

"I wonder if it's George Lines's mother that you mean?" queried Miss Graves, kindly. "Everybody knows him around here—the tax collector, and yet he's managed to keep popular."

"Yes, that's Lavina Lines's oldest boy. I've heard they built a new house."

"I know the place all right," said Miss Graves, turning the sleigh into a side street and stopping at a horse-block with "Lines" in raised letters. "Doris, you just hold the horse while I help Grandma out and up to the front door. Grandma, we'll be back for you in an hour, for you know the afternoons are short now."

"Now I want to buy my things," said Aurelia.

"My mother said I could do just as I pleased with my money."

"Did you make out a list?" said Miss Graves.

"What for?" asked Aurelia, with wide eyes.

"O, nothing," replied Miss Graves, "only that it's Christmas time, and I supposed you wanted to buy presents for your father and mother and Grandma."

"Well, I guess not," said Aurelia, tossing her golden head. "They can get their own things. I'm going to get me a gold ring with a blue stone like Doris has, only nicer and prettier, and a sash, and a pound of mixed candy."

"And I'm going to buy you a present, Aurelia," said Miss Graves.

"How nice!" said the girl, dimpling and smiling. "What is it?"

"I'm going to get you a new pig-bank to take the place of the one you broke to-day," replied Miss Graves, somewhat grimly. But Aurelia's mental density stood her in hand, and she said she would be glad of the pig.

Miss Graves hitched her horse in front of the shop of Aurelia's choice, and the purchases were soon made. Then they all drove around to the Turners', and Doris went in for a few moments for directions. Miss Turner sent Aurelia up into the front bedroom to take off her things, and when she was safely out of sight, caught Doris

in her arms, and kissed her heartily, saying: "You're a darling girl, and I want you to know that I love you dearly. You have a very good mind, and you won't have to live always with the Wildes. Just keep up your courage, dear."

Then she picked up a small parcel and said, "I'll go out to the sleigh with you, for I want to speak to Miss Graves." So she threw a light shawl over her head and took Doris by the hand, and they ran down the steps and the path to the front gate.

"I'm so glad that Doris could come to Kent, Miss Graves."

"Well, if it hadn't been for you helping out by inviting Aurelia, the child couldn't have gotten away."

"I have a box of candy here for Doris," said Miss Turner. "Do you suppose she will be allowed to keep it?"

"I'll look out for that," replied Miss Graves. "You mustn't stand out here in the cold. Run in and see me when you're up to the Corners, and thank you kindly."

Louise Turner bent and kissed Doris good-by, putting the parcel into her hand, and hurried back into the house. Aurelia was looking out of the front bedroom window.

"Now," said Miss Graves, "we'll drive into one of the sheds back of the hotel, before we go

for Grandma, and look over that list of yours."

Miss Graves smoothed out the piece of paper on the cover of an account book that she held on her knee. Doris was highly excited. "Don't forget, please, not to look at that little turned-under part, Miss Graves."

"Doris, will you promise me not to spend any of your money for me?"

"O, please don't say that," pleaded Doris. "It would break my heart not to give you anything," and she thought of the bag she had seen Miss Courtney carry with "things inside."

"Doris, I think more of your love than anything you could buy for me in the shops, even if you had a thousand dollars to spend. Don't you know that real love is the most precious thing in the world?"

"But you can't do it up in a package and put it into anybody's hand, Miss Graves."

"No, little girl, but if I should tell you that my hands are pretty well filled with all that I really need to use, but that my heart had a very lonely spot in it that your love and gratitude have made less lonely, perhaps you can understand that you can give me no more beautiful gift. Do you see?"

Doris nodded somewhat dubiously. In the blaze of Christmas shops the flesh and the spirit seem to waive for a season their age-long enmity.

"Now, dear, is there anything you can think of that Grandma would enjoy, rather than the furs and the chair?"

"I thought of a rubber hot-water bottle," said Doris, regretfully.

"The very thing," replied Miss Graves. "You see, she goes out very seldom, but she does go to bed every night, and think how soft and warm the bottle will be to her cold tired feet! You can get one for one dollar and a half, and have three dollars and a half left for the other presents. There are books of poems for fifty cents gotten up for Christmas, and we can find one of them that Kelsey will enjoy, and a nice handkerchief each for the Wildes is plenty good enough, and for the hired men, two boxes of writing paper at twenty cents. Those people are always writing letters to the old country. I've allowed fifty cents for Mrs. Wilde's handkerchief, so it will be quite fine and nice for her to carry to church. She knows good things."

"I'd just love to give Miss Turner a pretty handkerchief," said Doris.

Miss Graves had been expecting this, and answered, "Well, you see, you can do it very nicely, for you have nearly two dollars left. We'll get a pretty one like Mrs. Wilde's."

"And that leaves me over a dollar, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Doris."

"Miss Graves, I've never in my life spent more than a penny for candy at a time, and I'd like to feel how it seems to buy as much as a quarter's worth all at once. Grandma just loves cream peppermints, and I'm sure that the man who brought me up on the stage must like 'em too. He is a very kind man. You can hand them to him, can't you, Miss Graves?"

"Certainly, my dear."

"And now, please, please don't ask any questions, but let me have a little secret with that last dollar. We won't say what's going to be done with it."

Miss Graves saw that she was quite helpless. "Doris," she said, "I won't object to your spending it as you like if you will tell me one thing."

"What is that, Miss Graves?"

"Isn't there something that you need very, very much, that you really ought to have?"

"I suppose," said Doris, reluctantly, "that I ought to get a new toothbrush; mine is pretty much worn out."

"Then, dearie," replied Miss Graves, "I'll promise not to say a word about the change if you will consent to letting me help you to select a good brush."

"Now, Miss Graves, if you like, you may read what's turned under on that paper. I wanted to get it, O, so dreadfully!"

"You generous child," answered Miss Graves, smiling into the upturned eyes with a sudden mist in her own; "it may comfort you to know that that bag of Miss Courtney's cost at least fifty dollars. Now let us go after Grandma."

They found Grandma radiant from a long satisfying talk with her old friend. It would not have been difficult for Gale to arrange for such occasionally. She had never realized her mother's need of a bit of social life. Grandma was well set up, refreshed not only by news but by a cup of delicious afternoon tea, and she entered into the expenditure of her dollar with a zest and mystery that was pathetic to Miss Graves. "When it takes so little to make people happy," she said to herself, "why should anybody be left out in the cold?"

At least, she had the satisfaction of filling two cups with the wine of joy that day. Doris went from counter to counter with bright, eager eyes and flushed cheeks, and when the bag and the book and the handkerchiefs and the candy had all been selected and tied up in neat little packages, and Miss Graves had vigorously insisted on a good thirty-cent toothbrush and a cake of white, violet-scented soap, Doris declared, "Now you will walk to the other end of the store, won't you? And you will keep your back turned this way? And you truly, truly won't forget and

look over your shoulder, nor guess a single, tiny bit, will you?"

So Miss Graves solemnly promised, and walked away, sorry but smiling, and Doris made her first unassisted purchase. When one considers that Miss Graves from her earliest infancy had been a regular attendant at the church of her Puritan ancestors, had never indulged in "worldly amusements," or ever been known to "keep company," it might be called slightly incongruous that Doris should have chosen a lithograph of the Repentant Magdalen as her first Christmas gift to her kind friend. Years after they laughed over the selection together, but to the day of her death the picture in its gilt frame never left its place on that strait-laced spinster's bedroom wall.

After all this shopping was done, and the things needed by Mrs. Wilde bought, Miss Graves invited Grandma and Doris into the drug store for hot chocolate. At the door they came face to face with Silas Webb and his wife. When Doris was presented to Mrs. Webb a puzzled look came into the kindly face of that stout matron.

"I can't have seen you before, child, and yet your countenance is familiar. It will worry me until I can place it. Perhaps it's because Silas has talked so much about you that I feel as if I knew you."

"Mr. Webb was very good to me," said Doris.

"How's she gettin' along?" questioned Silas in an aside to Miss Graves.

"She doesn't complain," said Miss Graves; "she isn't that sort, but I have my eye on her, and I mean to keep it there too."

Before the trio entered the sleigh for the homeward climb the stores were lighted for the evening trade, and this gave a festal air to their departure. Not until the furthest outlying lamp-post was passed did either Grandma or Doris cease looking backward.

"Annet," said Grandma, "this has done me a wonderful sight of good. I'd rather have it than all the anchors an' harps an' wreaths of purple everlastin's that you could pile on my grave. When I'm gone you jest remember what a happy day you gave me."

When they drew up at the Wildes' gate Kelsey and Mrs. Wilde both came out to help bring in the supplies Mrs. Wilde had instructed Grandma to buy. Doris had time to hand Miss Graves the picture she had bought for her. The box of candy from Miss Turner had been wrapped up with the child's purchases for the family, "Because," argued the postmistress, "if you say the bundle is Christmas presents for the family, of course it won't be opened."

Miss Graves drove away with a song in her heart, and the others entered the house. Doris

was proceeding toward the stairs when Mrs. Wilde, setting down an armful of parcels on the table, suddenly turned on her. "What's that you have there?" she demanded.

"Some things I bought," replied Doris, hugging her treasured package, the joy of the day still in her eyes. "Christmas things, you know."

"*You bought things!*" ejaculated her mistress, "*you!*" She snatched the bundle from the child's arms. Thaddeus had just come in, but Kelsey was stabling the horse. Abigail began to untie the string that held the outside wrapping. "Where did you get any money to spend, I'd like to know?" she continued, beginning on the inner wrapper with ruthless fingers. Another instant and all the separate parcels would be lying on the table. Doris stretched out a pleading hand. "O, Mrs. Wilde," she said, "please, please don't open the things. It will spoil my Christmas!"

"I told you before you had nothing to do with Christmas, except what they've got you into up at the Ridge, which I don't take no stock in at all. Of course I shall open these parcels," and she proceeded to take up the pasteboard box containing the hot-water bag. Grandma was standing near trying to speak, but overwhelmed as usual by the tremendous force of her daughter.

"O, Mrs. Lane," cried Doris, "please do go in the sitting room, or anywhere, only don't look."

"Now, see here," spoke up Thaddeus, striding forward, and with one swoop of his long arm gathering up the whole pile and handing it to Doris, "take these and go up to your room."

"Wait," said Abigail, fiercely, taking her by the arm; "you may first tell me how you got any money to spend. I think I had better count over the change in my box."

Doris turned very pale. "I am no thief, Mrs. Wilde," she said in a low tone. "The money was mine. I sold my ring."

Abigail winced a trifle, but made no apology. "Well, go along and take off your hat and coat, and hurry down again. I don't know what call you have gettin' stirred up about Christmas. Aurelia's goin' to have a piano, but aside from that and the things for her stockin' there's nothin' doin'. I've told you several times, and I mean it, that you're here to do things and not to get things. Now hurry!"

Doris was so relieved that her gifts were not exposed to the family eye before the right time that she did not take Mrs. Wilde's tirade very much to heart. To be sure, it took the fine edge off from the rapture of the day, but as she put away the parcels she said to herself, "I know there is a Christmas for me in the House of Love, and I shall hang up my stocking. Mrs. Wilde can't keep the things that are really for me from

getting into it. At least, I will save Miss Turner's box of candy and put in it."

During the next forenoon Aurelia arrived in high feather. She followed Doris from kitchen to pantry and even into the cellar descanting on the joys of her visit, often interpolating, "Don't you wish you had had that?" or "Wouldn't you have been dee-lighted if you could have seen it too?" but finally, when they were in earshot of Mrs. Wilde, Aurelia questioned, maliciously: "I saw Miss Turner kiss you good-by, and she gave you a box that looked like bonbons. Was it?"

"I haven't opened the box," replied Doris.

"What's this about?" said Mrs. Wilde, as she whirled the egg-beater. "Doris, you go up and bring that down here at once. No wonder you acted so scared and sneakin' last night. You were hidin' things to gormandize on up in your room. You sly little cat!"

Doris came back with the precious box. It was the very first she had ever owned, and she had so far resisted even one peep under the lid. Mrs. Wilde took it from her hand. "Did Miss Turner give you a box too, 'Relia?"

"No," answered Aurelia; "she said she would like to give me some candy, but she was afraid you wouldn't like it, seein' you're so particular about what I eat, but I want some awfully. O, O, let's see!" as her mother tore off the white

wrapper that had been tied with a red ribbon, with a little sprig of holly on top.

"Gale," interposed Grandma, tremulously, "do you think you had oughter open the box? It was given to Doris."

"Mar," replied Abigail, sharply, "this child is beholden to me for the clothes on her back, an' the food in her mouth, an' I have a perfect right to do as I think best with anything that concerns her. So just keep out of this."

"O, give me one, give me one!" cried Aurelia, dancing up and down as the delicious-looking top layer showed between the edges of lace paper. "Give me that big pink one with the nut on it!"

Mrs. Wilde handed the box toward her and she selected the coveted sweet, and said, "What's underneath, ma, in the next layer?"

"All chocolates," answered Mrs. Wilde, lifting the waxed paper. "Doris, since you smuggled this candy into the house, you can have none of it, not one piece. I shall lock it in the sideboard with 'Relia's other things.'"

It seemed to Doris that she had never wanted anything so much as one of those candies. Aurelia flourished the pink one of her choice, and took small nibbles to make it last, and even held it under the rightful owner's nose with that taunting, close-lipped little sound that children use, which can never be transferred to print.

Doris felt a strong impulse to lift the dripping brush from her pail and with a sudden thrust to send that rosy morsel flying afar from her tormentor's fingers, but instead she rose to her feet, looking suddenly taller and older than before, and her eyes blazed, not with retaliation, but with a great sense of the injustice of it all. She did not raise her voice, but the low, even tone of it went straight to the mark. "Mrs. Wilde," she said, "that candy was given to me. I had a right to bring it here and take it up to my room. I expected to pass it all around, and you saw that I had not opened it. You do wrong to take it from me. Please give it back to me at once."

Strange to relate, Mrs. Wilde went as one dazed to the sideboard and brought back the box and silently handed it to Doris. Aurelia also was large-eyed and dumb. Doris took off the cover, passed the box to Grandma and the others, helped herself with great deliberation, and set the box on the table, saying, "It can be passed around after dinner, and I will be glad, Mrs. Wilde, to have Aurelia eat as many as you think best to give her."

Silence still prevailed in the room. Aurelia retired to play with her dolls, and Mrs. Wilde went into the storeroom and sat down on a sugar barrel, passing her hand over her forehead as if something had hit her. "She wasn't common

mad, nor common sassy," she mused. "What on earth was it?"

"Doris," whispered Grandma, "how'd you ever dast?"

"I don't know," replied Doris, helping herself to another bonbon, "but I felt the rightness, Grandma, dear."

CHAPTER X

THE THIEF

MRS. WILDE's dislike of Doris was intensified by this last incident, but at the same time the strange influence that had stayed her hand since the affair of the red dress now seemed to modify her tongue, and make her realize that she must not exact quite as much work as she had been forcing out of her capable little handmaid. Her conscience, too, often worried her with the matter of the fly-leaf to Doris's Bible, and yet she exulted inwardly over the secret knowledge that this child of high lineage and innate fine breeding and many talents was under her heavy domination.

It was now only a few days before Christmas, and the main subject of discussion in the Wilde family was the coming of the upright piano that had been ordered through the agency in Kent and was expected daily from New York. Mrs. Wilde talked very freely on the subject at the table, and between meals, of the price which she had largely gotten together from her butter and egg money, of the fact that Thaddeus had already contributed the initial payment of one hundred dollars, and

of the extra cost in fuel to keep the hitherto unused parlor open and warm. The people at the Ridge had no cold, shut-up parlors. Aurelia had never wearied of talking of the warm halls and open doors at the Meldens'.

"Doris," she said, "don't you wish you had a piano coming?"

"I have," replied Doris.

"O, what a whopper!" exclaimed Aurelia. "Where is it?"

"I can't say exactly to-day," smiled Doris, giving an extra polish to the glass sweetmeat dish she was drying. "Perhaps it isn't put together yet." She had seen the inside of the piano at the church. "Maybe," she went on, and her imagination caught fire, "maybe part of it is growing in the woods in a big tree with snow on the branches, and in summer there are lots of birds among the leaves, and they make the tree a musical tree, you know."

Aurelia sniffed contemptuously, but Doris continued gleefully: "I wouldn't wonder if the keys are roaming about in jungles in Africa, and the iron is shut up in the dark somewhere down in the ground in this country, and the wool for the hammers is on a sheep's back in Scotland. But it's my piano just the same."

"I don't believe you'll ever, ever get it," said Aurelia, grudgingly. "Mine will be here very

soon, and mother says you are not even to touch it except to dust it, and that I'm going to begin lessons right away. Won't you feel horrid, Doris, when you hear me playing pieces?"

"No, Aurelia, I won't. I'll be very glad when you can play. Why shouldn't I be?"

"Because you won't know how yourself and I will!" And Aurelia walked loftily away.

That evening in the mail came a note from the piano agent in Kent saying that the instrument would be sent up the next morning. Mrs. Wilde was full of importance as she descanted at the supper table on her disapproval of the installment plan of payment.

"I did it once," she said, decidedly, "when I bought that oak bedroom set for my room, but I never will again. I never got so sick of any human bein's face as I did of that collector's. He only came once a month, but it seemed to me he was forever under foot. If the piano's all right, sounds good, and ain't scratched when it's set up, I've got the cash all ready, and, Thaddeus, either you or I will drive down to Kent the next day with it. What's that you say, Thaddeus? Safer to keep it in the bank and pay by check? Well, I like my money where I can see it and lay my own hands on it any minute. There ain't no cashier goin' to run off with my savings, not if I know myself!"

Doris happened to glance at the swarthy Hungarian farm hand who sat with the Swedish gardener at the lower end of the table. Mr. and Mrs. Wilde occupied opposite sides of the table, each sitting in the middle. This Hungarian, Borka by name, was supposed to know only enough English, and that in detached words, to enable him to understand, by the aid of vigorous gesticulation on Mr. Wilde's part, the rough tasks he was required to perform day by day. He had never evinced any desire to learn to talk, paid no attention to conversation, and had never been known to utter a word of English. The Swede understood well, spoke brokenly, had been on the place for two years, and was entirely trustworthy. Doris had never liked the appearance of the Hungarian. He was a surly, black-browed fellow. This time when she happened to glance at him she detected a furtive air of alertness to what Mrs. Wilde was saying, and also a swift, apparently involuntary lifting of his heavy eyelids, revealing the dark glitter of eyes that for the instant were far from dull, but full of cunning. It was all so fleeting that Doris could hardly believe that she had seen the momentary revelation, but it clung to her thoughts and troubled her.

That very evening was to be a final, full-dress rehearsal of the cantata. The two girls went up from the Corners on the stage. Silas's wife was

on the back seat. He had talked much to her about Doris and her motherly heart had gone out to the homeless waif. She regaled the children with molasses chips from a paper bag, and talked about the coming cantata, which was exciting the keenest interest all through the Ridge. A lantern swung from the front end of the roof of the stage, and Mrs. Webb's eyes scanned the face of Doris with a puzzled and questioning look. A parcel became detached from the luggage and rolled out into the road.

"Whoa, Pepper!" roared Silas. Pepper turned a deaf ear and went on. "Whoa, there, drat him!"

A tremendous tug on the right line broke the time-worn leather in two and Pepper stopped. "P'raps you'll own up now that you don't know it all," blustered Silas, with a vigorous but kindly slap of the hand on the rusty side of his business partner, as he stood in the road and fumbled for his jackknife and a piece of string. Pepper knew the slap was a "love-pat," and shook his head, breathing frostily.

"You won't, will you?" went on Silas. "Wall, all I kin say is thet yer spiled to the last hair of yer hide."

The line repaired, Silas picked up the sack of hickory nuts from the ground, and as he was resuming his place his wife remarked eagerly,

"Say, Silas, I've seen this little Avery girl's face somewhere!"

But Pepper had started, and the reply of his master was lost in the sound of crunching wheels. "My housekeepin' don't amount to much," went on Mrs. Webb, "so I often go out helpin' the folks at the Ridge. Sometimes I go to sweep and dust in the Manor. That's a grand place, my dears. There's one great, long hall with nothin' but picters on the walls, picters an' winders, paintin's of the dead an' gone Waverleys, you know. They say that young Allston's in love with the old place and will open it up again some day. Well, here we be at the store. It ain't but a step to the hall over there."

Silas helped out Aurelia, and his wife thrust the few remaining candies into Doris's coat pocket as she left the old vehicle.

The ride and the talk with Mrs. Webb had diverted the mind of Doris from her uneasiness about Borka. Before she had left the house that evening Doris had had an opportunity to say to Kelsey that she felt a little suspicious of the Hungarian, and that he knew more English than the family had supposed. Kelsey had replied that the same thought crossed his own brain a few days before, when he had come upon Borka in the haymow at noon, reading a newspaper which Kelsey was sure was a Chicago publication and

not printed in a foreign tongue. Borka had hastily folded the paper and put it in his pocket. Then Doris recalled something else that had happened a few nights before. A Kent grocer had driven up to settle for the month's supply of eggs. Mrs. Wilde had talked with him for a quarter of an hour before supper. He put some banknotes in her hand, and after he left she lighted a small hand-lamp, still holding the bills in her left hand, and made her way up the back stairs. Doris then heard her go up into the attic, as she very often had done before. Borka was filling the wood-box when the money was paid to Mrs. Wilde, and, although he had not quite finished, he went out the back door just as she climbed the stairs. Doris stole out behind him, and, hidden in the shadow of the grape trellis, saw him go to the barn, where his room was situated, and shortly after lift a scuttle in the roof a few inches, from which vantage point he commanded an almost level view of the attic window. Doris turned and looked up to that window and saw the dull gleam there and a moving shadow on the curtainless panes. She reentered the kitchen with her mind full of anxiety, and determined to watch developments. The rehearsal went off beautifully, and Aurelia was so pleased with her long, flowing robe and white wings that she forgot for once to be jealous of Doris, and the ride home was pleasant. The next

morning the whole family were in a state of excitement anticipating the arrival of the new piano. Aurelia stood for an hour at the window that commanded a view of the road toward the Corners. Doris was busily assisting Mrs. Wilde to rearrange the long-closed parlor. The shutters were opened, the shades drawn up behind the Nottingham lace curtains, and for the first time in years the morning sunlight streamed over the great baskets of red roses on the Brussels carpet. Out from its corner, creaking and protesting in every joint, came the old black haircloth sofa to make room for the piano in the long space between the corner and the north window. The marble-topped table supporting a small cross under a glass cover, the cross of white wax wreathed with large wax roses, was removed from the center of the room to a place between the front windows. The square ottoman in a mahogany frame, worked in cross-stitch on a black ground by the grandmother of Thaddeus, was shoved into a corner beside the "what-not," whose set of triangular shelves supported sea-shells, a branch of white coral, daguerreotypes, a glass paper weight with a view of the White House, the topmost tier shamelessly flaunting a hideous bouquet of variegated flowers done in wools. An old gilded candelabra on the mantle shelf caught the sunshine on its dangling prisms

and seemed to tremble and flash with indignation at the innovation.

"It's coming; O, goody, it's coming!" screamed Aurelia from her watchtower, clapping her hands as the truck loomed in sight. A few moments later all was confusion. The driver of the truck was the only man sent up by the agent, and Thaddeus and the two hired men were summoned to assist in carrying the piano up the path and into the house. The front door was removed from its hinges, and a flood of icy air rushed into the hall. The driver shouted directions at the other three men, whose awkwardness made the task doubly hard. Mrs. Wilde, with her head and shoulders muffled in a striped afghan, hovered over the scene, crying, "Don't drop it, don't drop it!"

"For heaven's sake, go in the house!" roared the purple and exasperated Thaddeus, who had jammed his thumb.

The driver swore in German, the Hungarian broke his habitual silence and shouted in his native Slav dialect, the Swede grunted and tugged. Mrs. Wilde still hovered, suggesting, warning, getting in the way, and the spotted coach-dog contributed to the general unhappiness and noise by making wild dashes among the legs of the men and barking fierce protests at the proceedings. But at last the instrument stood in its allotted place, di-

vested of the old quilts and pieces of ancient lap-
robes that had enwrapped it, and shone forth in
all the glory of polished oak, gilt lettering, and
black and white keys. The men left, the door
was hung and shut, and as soon as a wood fire,
now burning briskly in the small cylinder stove,
had begun to modify the frigid air, Mrs. Wilde
unlocked the sitting room, wherein she had im-
prisoned the impatient Aurelia to keep her from
catching cold, and she and Grandma were allowed
to inspect the new treasure.

"I want Doris to see it!" said Aurelia, whirl-
ing around on the new stool and then back again
to thrum on the keys.

"Doris," called Mrs. Wilde, "come here!"

Doris quickly appeared, and Mrs. Wilde went
on, "Miss Aurelia wishes you to see her Christ-
mas present, but this is as good a time to tell you
that you are never to touch it. Isn't it a beauty?"

"Indeed it is," replied Doris, heartily, in spite
of tears in her eyes. "It must be splendid to learn
to play."

"Well, now, you can go back into the kitchen,"
said Mrs. Wilde, "and practice with the potato
knife. Aurelia, you must begin lessons next
week."

Doris returned to her work, and heard Aure-
lia strumming discordantly on the piano for many
minutes. "I'm sure I could pick out a tune with

one finger," thought Doris. "I can feel the music tingling in my arms and hands as if it wanted to get out. I'm glad there's a piano for me somewhere. It's really God who makes 'em, and he has plenty. Perhaps while I'm waiting for mine, he will let me play on Aurelia's, even if Mrs. Wilde did say I couldn't!"

The cantata was to come off that night, and Mrs. Wilde nearly exhausted her ingenuity all day in trying to unfit Doris for the important part she was assigned to sing. She offered her the unprecedented treat of a large and greasy and not over-light doughnut with her morning coffee. Doris didn't happen to want it. Midway of the morning she set her to washing the parlor windows on the outside, hoping she might take cold and get hoarse. At noon, instead of the narrow sliver of pie which she occasionally allowed Doris for dessert, she almost insisted on her eating a generous triangle of mince-pie, of which the crust happened to be too rich and somewhat underdone. She was furious when Doris cut off a small strip from the slice, ate the inside and left the crust.

"I'd like to know," she shouted, "if my vittles are not good enough for you, you snippy little piece! Here I am tryin' to build you up for to-night with good, nourishin' food, and you stick up your nose at it! It'll be many a day before you get another piece of pie, I can tell you!"

"Be careful, Doris," said Kelsey, when she passed him on her way to feed the chickens. "She's trying to knock you out."

"Kelsey," replied Doris, "I told you once about the House of Love, but you sort of laughed at me. Didn't you notice in the Psalms last Sunday morning, it told about a 'House of Defense'? Well, that's another name for the House of Love."

"You funny, plucky child!" said Kelsey, kindly. "I don't know what you're driving at, but you're all right!"

During her work Doris had thought much about her suspicions of the Hungarian, and felt that she must speak to some one of the family before they should all start for the Ridge that evening. Mrs. Wilde had spoken freely about having money in the house for the piano, and Doris knew it was probably concealed in the attic. She was positive that Borka knew this also. Every one of the family would be at the Ridge until late, and the Swede was going to Kent to spend the evening with millhands who were his fellow-countrymen. Borka had also made it understood that he would also go to Kent. After supper, when the two hired men had left the kitchen and Mrs. Wilde had gone up to her room to dress, Doris said to Mr. Wilde: "Please excuse me, but you know we are all going away

to-night. Do you think it is safe to leave any money in the house?"

"Nonsense, child," replied Mr. Wilde. "This house is perfectly safe, off the main road, and in the dead of winter too. Why, we hardly ever see a tramp here even in the summer time. What ever ails you?"

"But, Mr. Wilde, I feel so about it. Look out for your money."

"Well, I'll speak to my wife."

"Don't mention me, please."

Thaddeus could see the wisdom of that, and when he followed Abigail upstairs to change his clothes, he said, casually: "I've been thinking about that piano money. I don't know where you keep it, but unless you are dead sure it's safe, you'd best take it with you."

"Safe!" exclaimed Abigail, energetically. "I'd like to see the robber that would find that four hundred."

"But, Gale, that money means years of hard work to you, an' 'Reely's chance to play the piano. I don't want to interfere, but it's my opinion you'd be better off to take it along."

Abigail brushed her hair with long, defiant strokes, but an anxious look crept into her eyes. Presently she spoke, resentfully: "I would never have had an idea but that the money was all right, but now you've put the thought into my mind,

I'll be worrying the whole evening if I don't take it."

She sighed heavily, lighted a candle, and mounted the attic stairs. Soon she came back with a large roll of bills, which she placed in a chamois bag, which she hung around her neck before putting on her black silk shirt-waist.

"Now I hope you feel better, Thaddeus," she said, tartly. "I was tired enough without going to all this extra trouble." In the meantime Doris, downstairs, had taken Aurelia's silver and Mrs. Wilde's dozen solid "company spoons" and hidden them in the corn meal in the pantry.

At last they had all made ready for the drive, and started off expectantly. It was a clear, starlit night, and at the Corners they fell into a procession of vehicles coming from Kent and the north farm district.

"You must be shaking in your shoes, Doris," said Aurelia, "to have to sing all alone before such a lot of people. I wouldn't wonder if you broke down."

"Well, nobody will care if she does," said Mrs. Wilde, "because she won't be noticed anyhow. It's probably some little part that they couldn't get anybody else to take."

"I'd much rather be an angel," said Aurelia, "even if I don't sing alone."

Grandma gave Doris a comforting pat in the

dark. The child was trembling with weariness and nervousness, and fearing lest she might disappoint the Meldens and Miss Courtney. When they arrived at the hall a crowd had assembled, the orchestra was tuning up, and the dressing rooms were buzzing with excitement. By the time Doris was arrayed in the dainty blue-flowered organdie that she was to wear in the first scene at a Christmas Eve party she had forgotten everything but her part. The cantata became her life for the time being. The plot was not specially original, but the music was exceedingly engaging and the scenery attractive.

Into the midst of a family party grouped around a Christmas tree came a fairy with a sad tale of three poor little children and a sick mother in a tenement not far away. Of course a basket was packed with toys and candy, and another with food, and a delegation from the family set out to carry happiness to the comfortless ones. In the room at the tenement the three little children have hung up their stockings and gone to sleep. The mother, overwhelmed with grief and discouragement, does not hear the song of angels which her little ones hear in their sleep. The white forms bend lovingly over the bed, and the children smile. But the mother lifts her head from her arms that rest on the table, and sings a song of the Empty Stockings. "I could fill them out of my heart."

Merry voices on the stairs. A knock at the door. Enter fairy, father, aunt, big brother, and several children, carrying bundles and baskets. Grocer's boy follows with tree, candles, and yards of tinsel. Doris had laid aside her furs, and had gathered the thoroughly aroused children close to her side. She sang the "Song of the Tree." It was a pretty little song, but Doris made a gem of it. It brought down the house. The applause was insistent. Mr. Melden nodded to his orchestra, and to Doris. Again she sang the three short verses and chorus. The applause was louder and more prolonged. Mr. Melden was smiling. He signaled for the third rendering, and again Doris sang:

"In the heart of the woods so far away,
Where all was green and still,
God planted a tree for you one day,
By the side of a mountain rill,
And only the birds and the fairies knew
That it was for you, my dears, for you!"

The music itself was bewitching, but Doris, with that ever-vivid, pulsating imagination of hers, entered into the spirit of it all with a tenderness and joy that went victoriously to the very heart of the house. Mrs. Wilde alone glowered sourly, and dug an admonitory elbow deep into the side of Thaddeus, who was clapping with all his might.

A lady who sat at one side well toward the

front, with a green shade over her eyes, and had been very courteously led to her seat by the hand of a trained nurse, who now sat beside her, lifted her head, which had been bowed somewhat dejectedly. Every line of her fine, mobile face expressed interest and delight.

"Who is it?" she whispered to the nurse, who held a program.

"Let me see," she replied, running her eyes down the page. "'Song of the Empty Stockings,' 'Song of the Angels,' 'Song of the Tree'—yes, here it is—Doris Avery is the name, Mrs. Gilbert."

"Is she one of the Ridge children?" asked Mrs. Gilbert. "I've been shut in so long that I have nearly lost track of things here."

"I will inquire of Mr. Melden," said the nurse.

After the cantata came a distribution of gifts to the choir and school. The usual collection of candies, books, oranges, and dolls; but Doris had a large box from the Melden children, which contained a framed photograph of the Madonna of the Chair, like the picture over their nursery mantel. Many people sought out Doris, taking her hand, and speaking kindly words, and Mrs. Wilde hurried her husband out to get the team. No one had congratulated Aurelia, and in the final tableaux she had been somewhat eclipsed by a pair of wings in front of her. She was in a

most unangelic mood during the drive home, and her mother maintained a weighty and ominous silence that could be felt. She was wondering what she dared to do to Doris.

They had left a lantern burning on the kitchen table when they went away, but as they approached the house they missed any light from the window.

"Why, it's all dark!" exclaimed Abigail, sitting suddenly upright, and speaking for the first time. The outside door was ajar.

"Something's up!" said Thaddeus, fumbling for a match in his vest pocket, and forgetting it was his Sunday garment. Abigail pushed past him into the room, and made her way to the clock shelf, where she always kept a candle and matches. Doris felt a sudden thrill of satisfaction as she thought of the secreted silver, and of the money somewhere in Mrs. Wilde's keeping, for she had heard her heavily and reluctantly mount the garret stairs before they had all set forth that evening. Grandma and Aurelia huddled together on the porch until a feeble ray from the candle had given Thaddeus guidance to light the drop-lamp in the sitting room. The kitchen had been scarcely disturbed, but the first sight that met their eyes was the mahogany sideboard with every door standing open and every drawer lying on the floor, while table linen, sewing ma-

terials, toys, Aurelia's dainties, and many other articles such as will accumulate in so roomy a receptacle were scattered about in confusion.

"Murderashun!" exclaimed Grandma, who had now ventured in with Aurelia clinging to her skirt, curiosity surmounting fear.

Mrs. Wilde was white to the lips. "The silver's gone!" she cried.

"Indeed it isn't, Mrs. Wilde," said Doris. "I hid it."

"What do you mean?" shouted Abigail, grabbing Doris by the shoulder. "Have you had anything to do with this? Where is the silver?"

"I hope it's in the pantry," answered Doris, starting in that direction with the whole family at her heels.

"Well, I vum!" said Thaddeus, as Doris thrust one arm down into the meal and brought up a neat parcel done up in white paper.

"A dirty trick, I must say," snorted Abigail, "putting things into foodstuff," and she proceeded to count the spoons.

"You'd better be thankful that they're all safe," said Thaddeus. "Let's go upstairs and see what's been goin' on there."

They found all in disorder. The beds had been overturned, bureau drawers turned upside down and emptied of their contents, the carpet ripped up in places, but nothing seemed to be

missing but an old-time gold brooch that belonged to Mrs. Wilde. She whispered to Thaddeus, and together they went up to the attic. A plank near the chimney had been removed, and the empty tin box in which Mrs. Wilde usually kept her savings lay thrown far along the floor. Involuntarily she clutched for the precious roll safe in her bosom. She sat down on the top step of the stairway.

"I'll tell you now, Gale," said Thaddeus, "that we have Doris to thank for not bein' robbed to-night. She's a wonderful sensible child, and she had noticed somethin' that made her ask me not to leave any money in the house."

"I'd 'most ruther have lost it than to have her save it for us," groaned Abigail. "I was thinking all the way home what I could do to take her down a peg. It was ridiculous, the fuss everybody made over her singin'."

"Well, come along," said Thaddeus. "I want to ask her what made her so suspicious."

During their absence, Doris had restored some degree of order to their bedrooms, and had made the bed, and turned down the coverlids smoothly and invitingly. She was now helping Aurelia to undress.

"I'm 'most too sleepy to hang up my stocking," said Aurelia, pettishly.

"I can tell you now there won't be much in it,"

retorted her mother. "A little girl that has a new piano for Christmas can't expect all the shops bought out for her besides." But even as she spoke she knew of a dozen different gifts that were stowed away on the top shelf in the clothes closet.

Thaddeus questioned Doris, and learned about Borka's peculiar actions, and sent Kelsey out to see if the man was in his room in the barn. Kelsey came back reporting his absence, and also the disappearance of his few belongings.

Mrs. Wilde let Doris go off to bed without a word of thanks, but the child was too tired and too happy to care. It was nearly midnight, but Grandma was still up, and moving about with an air of importance, nodding her head at intervals and smiling. Both Thaddeus and Kelsey had held unwonted converse with her during the day.

"Come, Doris, she said, for Doris was hanging over the della Sedia Madonna by the light of Grandma's lamp; "you can look at that all the rest of your life."

"But I hate to go to bed and forget I have it," replied Doris. "I really don't need any stocking."

"Well, you'd better hang one up; that's all I've got to say," said Grandma, "an' please hurry, for I'm that tired I shall drop in the traces."

Doris fastened the stocking on a nail near the

head of her cot, and pretended not to hear Grandma come tiptoeing in. But after the dear old lady had retired, Doris put out a hand and touched the stocking. It was much larger than her own. It must be one of Grandma's! But why? Could it be that hers wasn't large enough to hold the things! And it was heavy too, so heavy that at her touch it swung back against the wall with a delicious thud! She could not resist running her fingers over the fascinating mystery. Yes, there were bulges, two of them, and something with corners, and a little, soft, rustly parcel and a small square, hard one away down in the toe? And it was for her, and daylight not many hours away! She turned resolutely from the treasure-trove.

"Good night, dear God!" she said.

The whole family overslept the next morning, but Doris was awake first. She took the stocking from its nail, and lay back again with it in her arms. "I know that Grandma will like to see me open it," she said to herself. "I'm afraid I'll have to wake her up."

She drew the gifts to Grandma from their hiding place, and went and laid them beside her on the bed. Then she kissed her, saying, softly, "Merry, merry Christmas!"

"Sakes alive, child, it can't be morning! Yes, I wish you the same, Doris. But what on airth's

this? Not suthin' for me? Why, child, I ain't had a Christmas present in twenty years." She sat up in bed, reaching for her spectacles from the little table beside it. "Why, what is it?" she asked, as the hot-water bag appeared from its wrapping. "I ain't seen nothin' like that before."

"Why, you know, Grandma, you always have a stone bottle in your bed all winter for your cold feet. This will be lighter to carry up and down, and lots softer too."

"But, Doris, won't it bust?"

Doris, out of the depths of her inexperience, assured her that it would not.

"Wall, I never!" said Grandma. "This must be the kind they use at the Ridge. I'm jest flabbergasted, Doris, at havin' a Christmas. And what's this?" picking up the candy box.

"Just peppermints, Grandma, but not the hard kind—nice, soft, creamy ones, you know."

"An' you thought of me, an' spent your little money for me," quavered Grandma, a tear starting down each cheek. But Doris didn't want to be thanked. "May I get in with you and open my stocking?" she asked.

"Wall, I ruther guess you may," replied Grandma, moving over to make room. "You don't mean to say you saved it all this time! I sez to myself last night, I sez, I'd give a dollar, poor as I be, to see that child undo her things."

Aurelia would have thought there was nothing at all in that stocking, but to Doris it was a mine of riches. There were a red, shiny apple and a large orange from Mr. Wilde, a copy of Anne of Geierstein from Kelsey, a set of flowered hair-ribbons from Miss Graves, and a bottle of cheap violet perfume from Grandma, that really smelled like vanilla, but to Doris it suggested Elysian fields. The square box in the toe contained her own, old, little turquoise ring. For a moment her pride was hurt, and tears came to her eyes, but there was a little note from Miss Graves with the box which read:

DEAR DORIS: The person who bought your ring sold it to another person, who wanted to give you a Christmas present, and consulted with me as to what she should buy for you. I knew that nothing would make you more happy than to have again the token of your one day at the shore, and as this lady has several rings, I suggested that she send you this as a Christmas gift. She doesn't wish her name mentioned, but sends her love and best wishes in the same bundle as mine.

Ever your loving friend,

ANNET W. GRAVES.

Doris kissed the little ring, and slipped it again on her finger. "Isn't the House of Love the wonderfulest place, Grandma?" she said.

When she went downstairs she placed her little purchases at the different plates on the table. Aurelia was following her mother about and whining peevishly, "Why didn't you get me a

pink sash? And you knew I wanted a hand-glass for my bureau."

"You are a sassy, ungrateful child!" declared Mrs. Wilde, pushing her to one side, and almost weeping herself. "Here I've gone and bought a piano, and only last night I spoke to Professor Deveraux from Kent about giving you lessons right after the holidays. You'd oughter be as happy as the day is long. Now, what's all this?" she continued as she took her place at the table, and picked up the little parcel at her plate. It bore a pretty card, wishing her all good cheer, and was signed "Doris."

She flushed painfully and was silent. Thaddeus unfolded the snowy handkerchief with a kindly word, Kelsey's face lighted up at the sight of the book of poems, and he flashed a bright, "Thank you" across the table; the Swede mumbled approval of his letter paper, and even Aurelia bore down on the scene pleased for the moment with the morsel of fine cambric with a tiny embroidered butterfly in the corner. Doris was radiant with delight in spite of Mrs. Wilde's sour and downcast face.

"Mamma," shrilled Aurelia, "why didn't you get something for Doris?"

"I gave Doris to understand," replied her mother, "that I was doing nothing for anybody but you, and small thanks I've had too."

"But Doris saved the piano," said Thaddeus. "It would have had to go back if the money had been stolen."

Mrs. Wilde gave an impatient ejaculation, pushed back her cup and saucer, and left the table, passing through the sitting room to the parlor, and shutting all doors behind her. She was having a struggle with herself. That same Professor Deveraux had spoken to her of Doris, of her talent and temperament, and had offered to give her a half-hour lesson whenever he came to Aurelia. And she had thanked him coldly, and had taken a savage pleasure in telling him that Doris was only a servant, and had no time to practice. What was it now that was urging her to be kind and just, to do violence to her jealousy and spite, to be a nobler and better woman? What was it that made her cringe as from a burning iron as she thought of that fly-leaf burned to ashes? Something was torturing, piercing, shaming her. Is there any weapon like Love? Is not Love a consuming fire? She returned to the kitchen. The men had all gone.

"Doris," she said, "I'm not made of molasses, and I never make a fuss over people, but I want to tell you that I appreciate the trouble you saved me last night, and I thank you for remembering me for Christmas. You're the only one in the family who did. I just want to say that you are

to have piano lessons from 'Relia's teacher and practice one hour a day, and no more. Now, don't say a word. I don't want to hear you. What on earth are you crying for?" and she lifted the coal-hod bodily and rattled the coal into the range with a savage energy. Doris, sobbing for joy, went rushing up to her room for a handkerchief and ran into Grandma at the top of the stairs.

"O, Grandma," she whispered, eagerly, "don't say a word downstairs, but God has lent me Aurelia's new piano till mine comes."

CHAPTER XI

KELSEY'S ERRAND

It was a month later when Mrs. Waverley Gilbert's liveried footman stood at the Wildes' front door with a message from his employer. Mrs. Gilbert was by far the most important lady at the Ridge. Her husband had been ambassador from the United States Government to a foreign court, and had distinguished himself by increasing the cordiality between the two nations, and furthering the interests of both. At his death his widow had retired to the home of her girlhood, where she maintained considerable state of a richly simple, quiet sort. Her beautiful things were never put away for company occasions, but were always in use, and her servants were trained to care for them. Her domestic affairs were run like clock-work. She had no children, and seldom any guests, for, next to travel, her one passion was for art, and her one weakness was in considering herself an artist. She had a large studio built in her garden, and when she was not making poor copies of the masters in foreign galleries, she was trying to paint historical subjects on wide can-

vases, and no one had ever had the courage to suggest that she was wasting her time, and perhaps she was not, if the delusion of talent made her happy and filled a void in her heart. But for a year she had been suffering with some trouble with the eyes, so that her two beloved occupations of travel and painting were taken from her, and life had become a weariness that only a tactful and cultivated companion had been able to relieve in a small degree. The companion had been summoned to her own home, and the nurse could not take her place.

"Remsen," she said to that patient, sensible, but not entertaining person, "I think I will go mad unless something can relieve this monotony. I want some music. Write a note and ask Miss Courtney to come over this afternoon and play for me—no, better still: do you recall the little girl who sang on Christmas Eve? I must have her come and sing for me. Do you know her name?"

"No, Mrs. Gilbert, but I can find out. You know you meant to inquire, after the cantata that night, and then some one took your mind off from it."

"Well, ring for James, and I will send him to the Meldens. They'll know."

That afternoon Mrs. Wilde received a shock more paralyzing than any that had preceded it,

for Mrs. Gilbert was a sort of uncrowned queen in the imagination of the whole countryside, and Mrs. Gilbert had sent for Doris. She did not dare to refuse the request. The man said he would wait with the brougham.

"Well, between your studyin' an' your singin' an' practicin', I get precious little good out of you," she snapped irritably. "I seem to be keepin' a young ladies' finishin' school. But you'll have to go, and if she offers you any pay, take it."

Doris was charmed with the large, Colonial house, and the regal white-haired woman in trailing heliotrope silk and amethysts. Mrs. Gilbert asked her to read and to sing for her, and then she said, "Do you know anything you can recite from memory?"

Kelsey had been faithful in his encouragement, and Doris had not only Emerson's "Snowstorm" and Byron's "Destruction of Sennacherib" at her tongue's end, but had added Wordsworth's "Daffodils," Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and "Chamounix," and Bryant's "To a Water Fowl" to her repertoire. She recited them all without self-consciousness or undue emphasis, but with genuine feeling.

Then Mrs. Gilbert drew her on to talk of her mother and their life together, and the green shade seemed to bother her a great deal, and her fine face grew very tender and sympathetic.

"And you know nothing about your people, Doris? Your mother was certainly refined and cultivated."

"No," replied Doris, sadly. "I had only a leaf in mother's Bible, and that has disappeared, and I never had been able to make out all of the writing it was so faded."

"Well, now I am going to let you go as soon as we have some afternoon tea. Tea isn't good for little girls, so I'll order chocolate for you. I intended to give you money for coming here to-day—"

"O, no, no!" interposed Doris.

"My dear, I realize that you have entertained me right from your heart, so I shall give you flowers instead. I cannot see to pick them, but my nurse will get them for you. You will hear from me again."

Doris went home with a great bunch of pink roses carefully wrapped in a box. Mrs. Wilde was highly displeased. "You can take that trash up in your own room," she said. "I won't have it litterin' up the downstairs. I wonder what those Ridge people think I'm givin' you your clothes and keep for, to spend half your time entertainin' them. I told you often it's got to stop, an' it has! Aurelia's portrait's most done, an' this choir business will be done too."

Mrs. Gilbert sent for Doris several times, be-

coming very fond of that adaptable and talented child. Abigail fumed and fretted, in spite of a handsome check that Mrs. Gilbert had sent to her in recognition of her right to Doris's time. At last, at the approach of spring, she sent for Mrs. Wilde herself, who went dressed in her best, and taking Aurelia in all the glory of her golden hair and blue velvet coat, forgetting that Mrs. Gilbert's eyes were still covered from the light.

"I believe she's goin' to ask for Doris," thought Abigail, shrewdly, "but she isn't going to get her, not if I know it. But I must seem to be struck with the idea and to consider it favorably."

She was quite right as to Mrs. Gilbert's intention.

The latter was anxious to learn just what right Mrs. Wilde had to the child, but did not wish to ask any direct question.

"I'm not making any calls nowadays, Mrs. Wilde, so I sent for you to thank you for loaning me your little handmaiden. She is a very charming child, as you well know."

"I can't say I've found her so," replied Abigail, tossing her head. The action itself was, of course, wasted on Mrs. Gilbert, but the toss was in her tone also. "She is one of the sort that knows how to put her best foot to the front where it suits her interests. If my own daughter here wasn't as patient and sweet-tempered as an angel, we

couldn't get along with Doris at all. She has a frightful temper, and is very untidy also. Of course you can't see that. I have to struggle to get her to make herself neat whenever she is coming to you."

Now it happened that Mrs. Gilbert had particularly asked her nurse about the personal appearance of Doris, and had passed her own hand over her hair and dress. She understood Mrs. Wilde from the start.

"Well," she replied, "it does seem a pity for you to be constantly annoyed by a child who has no claim on you. Is she bound out to you?"

"Ah, my fine madam," thought Abigail, "wouldn't you like to know that there ain't any papers!"

What she said was this: "Doris doesn't know a word of this, Mrs. Gilbert, but I really adopted her to bring her up as my own child, and it cost me a pretty sum at that what with the lawyer, and the money to the institution where I got her. But I tell you frankly I'm awful sick of my bargain, what with her temper and her sassy tongue and her bein' so slack about the work that I have to follow her around and make her do things over half the time."

"I'm sorry she's so different from what she seems when here," said Mrs. Gilbert with a fine sarcasm which was quite lost on Mrs. Wilde. "I

had no thought of adopting her even if she were free, but I do want her to live with me, if it can be arranged. There is a wonderful specialist in Vienna whom I wish to consult, and I would like to take the child with me."

Abigail's face was terrible to behold. All the hatred and bitterness and jealousy that had somehow been held in check rose in a deep, silent, powerful tide in her soul. Doris to live with Mrs. Gilbert, to cross the ocean with her, to travel abroad! Never! But to prevent it she must seem to favor it and to help it on.

Aurelia pulled at her sleeve. "Ma," she said in a loud whisper, "Doris ain't going to Europe is she?"

"I wouldn't wonder," replied her mother.

"She can't go, she sha'n't go! I want to go!" burst forth Aurelia.

"Hush, my darling," said Mrs. Wilde, a honeyed sweetness of tone covering but thinly the depths of wormwood beneath. "I think it would be lovely for Doris, so much more than I can do for her, that I must try to spare her, just as she is beginning to improve a little in her work."

"Will you waive your right in Doris, and hand over the adoption papers to my lawyer in Kent?" asked Mrs. Gilbert. "For a consideration of course," she added, "a handsome one."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Gilbert, but the papers got destroyed by mistake during the holiday season."

"But there must be a record of the transaction," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Mrs. Wilde, "but the lawyer I had died last month. I saw it in the paper. He died from shock when the building where his office was burned down. I'm afraid we can't get track of the matter, but I would feel I did wrong to stand in the way of Doris, and if you'll take her, you're welcome to her, and I don't ask any money for her neither."

Mrs. Wilde wanted a free hand.

"Well, surely I appreciate your acquiescence in my desires, Mrs. Wilde. I assure you, you will not regret it. I understand that I am at liberty to make all preparations for the trip, and see that Doris has a proper wardrobe?"

"O, certainly, Mrs. Gilbert. Anything I can do to help, please let me know."

"I will send for Doris in a few days to go down to Kent and be measured for her dresses."

"She is at your service, ma'am," said Abigail, but her eyes were diabolical.

"Ma," said Aurelia, after they were again in their sleigh, and Abigail had taken up the lines, "what makes your face so white and your eyes so black and bright? I feel almost afraid of you."

"Don't talk to me," said Abigail, hoarsely. "I don't feel well. I want to get home."

"She didn't give me any cake or candy or nothing," whined Aurelia.

"Didn't I tell you to shut up?" said her mother turning to her. "Of course not. It's that milk-faced, slippery, sneakin' little beggar that gets it all."

As she approached the house she hallooed and Kelsey came out to take the horse.

"Go right in the house," she said to Aurelia, "straight. I'm going around to the chicken yard a minute."

She watched Aurelia safely indoors, and then tramped on along the road. The snow was well packed in the middle of it, and she walked on with fierce strides, swinging her arms like a man, until she was quite out of sight of her home, and the light from the next farmhouse twinkled faintly a half a mile away. Then she stopped, stood still, and would have shrieked if she had dared. As it was she lifted her right arm, there in the dusk, and cried aloud, "Doris Avery to Europe! Never, never, never!"

But how to stop it? The icy wind blew sharply in her face, but she did not feel it. She stood with knitted brows and fierce eyes. "I have it!" she said aloud, finally, and turned toward home.

"I cannot understand that woman," Mrs. Gilbert had mused after her departure. "She was evidently lying about the adoption papers, but why she should enter so heartily into my plan, and refuse money too, is a mystery to me."

At the supper table Doris could scarcely believe her eyes and ears. A change had come over Mrs. Wilde. She smiled, she spoke kindly, even merrily. She talked freely to Thaddeus and Grandma of the wonderful luck that had come to Doris. They too were astonished that she took it so pleasantly.

"I expect you'll have a lot of pretty clothes, Doris, and you mustn't work too hard from now on, to get all tired out before you start."

Kelsey darted a look at Mrs. Wilde as her eyes dropped to her plate. He was suspicious of this remarkable transformation. "She has something up her sleeve, something that means ill to Doris," he thought. "I must keep a sharp watch out."

Doris was singing over the dishpan, when he had a chance to speak to her on his way upstairs, for Mrs. Wilde had gone in the parlor to hear Aurelia play her first five-finger exercise.

"Doris," he said, "it's mighty queer the Dragon is so sweet about your leaving her. Don't trust her!"

"I hardly know her to-night, she's so pleasant. She told me to come into the front room as soon

as the dishes are done, and play that piece I picked out by ear. She was very angry when she first heard it."

"Well, little girl, she's as cruel as ice, and as deep as a well, so go slow."

Even Kelsey's warning could not depress Doris, nor dampen her joy in her great good fortune. Aurelia was jealous and spiteful, but Mrs. Wilde reproved her vigorously at every turn. She allowed Doris to spend two Sunday afternoons with Mrs. Gilbert, and when the carriage came to take Doris to the train for New York city with Mrs. Gilbert and the nurse, Mrs. Wilde told Doris to be sure and bring home samples of everything to show her.

"Is she really so nice about your going, dear?" said Mrs. Gilbert, musingly.

"O yes," said Doris, joyously, "she takes a great interest, and is just as kind as she can be."

But Mrs. Wilde's rages when no one was around were fearful to the extreme. The hay-loft was her principal retreat when she was sure that the men were not in the barn. Here she could stamp noiselessly, and shriek with her head muffled in an old shawl. She could have killed Doris with zest, but instead she must play the intolerable role of the self-sacrificing and delighted friend and helper. The evening that Doris came back with the samples, and Abigail

knew that the Swede and the man who had taken Borka's place were at The Corners, she fled to the loft and dashed herself to and fro in the hay. Mrs. Gilbert through her sense of touch and her knowledge of shades had been able to use the eyes of Doris and Remsen and the salesgirl to the best advantage. There were a pretty, fine, gray goods for traveling, and a white cashmere for best, and a blue challie with tiny pink rosebuds, and light-blue silk for a kimono. And Doris told of the steamer trunk and leather hand satchel of her very own expressed from the city to Mrs. Gilbert's house with dainty, beribboned underwear, and two hats, and a box of silk stockings and slippers and boots and gloves. She showed a small leather pocketbook that Mrs. Gilbert had given her, and Mrs. Wilde accepted the gifts that Mrs. Gilbert sent in from the carriage, and nobody but Kelsey dreamed that she was anything but highly delighted.

Doris was to leave Deepfurrow Farm and go to Mrs. Gilbert one week before the date of sailing. She had yet two days with the Wildes, when Kelsey went one night as usual after the mail. Mrs. Wilde had always corresponded at intervals with the woman in New York whom she called Jule Grannis, but of late letters had come and gone several times a week. On this particular evening Miss Graves remarked as she handed

Kelsey a thick letter sealed with red wax, "I imagine this has something to do with Doris. I know the writing of that Grannis woman. She's the one that sent Doris up here after her mother died."

"Well, Doris is going to the Ridge day after to-morrow," said Kelsey, "and I'll be glad when she gets safely to Mrs. Gilbert's."

"Why, what's the matter, Kelsey?" said Miss Graves through the window in the door. "Can't you come in a minute?"

"No," said he, turning the letter over in his hand. "Mrs. Wilde told me not to be long. She's evidently expecting this. Miss Graves," he added, lowering his voice and looking cautiously around, "Doris has told you how Mrs. Wilde has been all honey-pie ever since she knew that Mrs. Gilbert wants to take her to Europe. It's too good to be true, her turning right about face and trying to help in every way. I've seen her only to-day look at Doris when the child's back was turned as if she'd like to run a knife through her."

"But she won't dare to hurt her," said Miss Graves with assurance.

"Not her body, of course not," replied Kelsey, "but I feel as if she will try to keep her from sailing. You see, Mrs. Gilbert won't dare to wait over even one boat, because the New York

doctor says she has no time to lose if she wants to keep her sight. I lay awake last night for the first time in my life. I'd give anything to know what's in this letter!"

"Well, all we can do is to keep our eyes and ears open," said Miss Graves. "You know you can count on me every time."

When Kelsey handed Mrs. Wilde the letter he could see that she was making a great effort to appear unconcerned, but her hand shook, and she did not open the letter, but put it in her pocket.

The next day the atmosphere of the house was electrical with excitement. Mrs. Wilde was what Grandma described as "tetchy," and started at every sudden sound. Grandma herself was constantly wiping her eyes on her kitchen apron. Aurelia was like a mosquito, keeping up a disagreeable, persistent, thin note of her own and stabbing whoever happened to be nearest. Doris, torn between the rapture of going abroad and a very real affection for Grandma Lane and Kelsey, was like an April day with sunshine and bird-notes between showers. Mrs. Wilde had transfixed the whole family at the close of breakfast, by putting an arm around Doris, and saying: "I didn't know I was getting so fond of you, child. I wish you were going to stay on with us, but of course, for your own good it is far better for you to go."

Kelsey didn't trust himself to look at her, for he felt that he would betray his suspicion in a glance. She must not know that he was on the alert. At the dinner table she said to him, "Kelsey, Sam Lowe's wife has offered to let me try her new bread-mixer, and I'll give you your supper early to-night, so that you can take Brewster and drive over after it. It's a matter of five miles each way, and the road may be bad yet in places, along Higsbee's Swamp, as the frost ain't all quite out of the ground. You'll get home by ten o'clock."

Kelsey started as arranged before the rest of the family had had their supper, but it was already dusk. "I think," he said to Mrs. Wilde, "every time I take out the old buggy it will never hold out for another trip, it's so shaky."

When he reached The Corners, Silas and Pepper had already left the evening mail and gone on up the hill, and Kelsey turned Brewster's nose toward a hitching-post, which had all the effect of a tie-line to that staid animal's comprehension, and hurried to the door of the post office.

"Go 'round to the side," said Miss Graves, from the mail window. She had an excited and mysterious air. "Silas had a passenger to-night," she said, "a tall man with a smooth face, very dark eyes, longish hair coming down over his

collar, and a circular cape like a woman's. Silas pumped him for all he was worth, but couldn't get ten words out of him except about the weather and that he wanted to get to The Corners. He wouldn't even tell whom he wants to see here. Said he'd wait a bit in the store and then walk."

"H'm—m," said Kelsey. "Guess I'll run over and take a look around."

He hastened across the road and up the worn steps. It was yet too early for the usual group of smokers and debaters to have collected, and the stranger sat at a distance from the stove on a packing case, and had loosened the large cape with its worn velvet collar. He had bought a couple of cigars to warrant his remaining there a while, but he seemed restless, and his eyes wandered uneasily from shelf to shelf and from the case to the door.

"You're waiting for some one to meet you, aren't you?" said Kelsey, advancing toward the man with an air of confidence. The stranger rose eagerly. He had something of a grand air, but was shabby and untidy. "Going to the Wildes', aren't you?" asked Kelsey, but the words were rather a statement than an interrogation. The man involuntarily cast a furtive look over his shoulder toward the clerk. The storekeeper was at supper, and the clerk was busy drawing molasses for a customer in the rear of the store.

"Yes, young man, I was waiting for a guide who was to meet me here."

"Well, I'm the one," said Kelsey, cheerfully. "My team's just outside."

"But I understood that it was only a short walk up the road," said the stranger.

"So it is when you're used to it," replied Kelsey, "but in the dark and for the first time it seems quite a tramp. Anyhow, the horse was all hitched to do an errand, and you can just as well ride as walk. Won't you come this way, sir?"

Kelsey conducted the man to the buggy, assisted him into it, and said, "Now just a moment, sir, I have to get the evening mail."

He went swiftly across the road and rapped heavily with the iron knocker on the door of the hall post office.

"Miss Graves," he whispered, tersely, "that man was waiting for some one from the Wildes'. He thinks I'm the one, and I have him in the buggy all right. We'll be some time getting there. I know Doris is in danger. I believe he's come for her. Can you get word at once to Mrs. Gilbert to send for Doris to-night?"

"O, Kelsey, don't be rash. It may be somebody on business—eggs or butter or vegetables. You don't really know anything, Kelsey. Better wait. You might stir up Mrs. Gilbert for nothing, and you know she isn't well, and she retires

very early. I'd send or go myself if I thought there were really anything to it."

"All right, Miss Graves. Good-night," said Kelsey, and he ran back and sprang into the seat beside the stranger, now muffled in his cloak. The buggy creaked and rattled as they moved slowly off. Brewster was not headed toward Deepfurrow Farm, but in the opposite direction along the north farm road. The man seemed rather restless. "Do you think we might get on a—a-h-m-m—a little faster?" said he.

"O, are you in a hurry, sir?"

"Yes, I have to get the midnight express from Ellsworth Junction."

There was no night train from Kent to New York. The junction was eight miles down the road, and a Boston train stopped there at twelve o'clock.

"O, I did not realize, sir, that you were pressed for time, and this is our old buggy and not very safe if one drives too fast. Then, too, I had an errand at that house you see yonder down the road, that will only keep me a moment."

The man gave a grunt of annoyance.

"There something wrong with this right wheel, I'm afraid," said Kelsey, after a few moments more of jogging. "It acts wabbly. I told Mrs. Wilde this buggy wasn't fit to use again. Just let me see."

He handed the lines to his companion and jumped to the ground, unfastening the lighted lantern from underneath the conveyance, and taking a wrench from its place under the seat. He loosened the wheel just enough to suit his purpose, and resumed his seat. The stranger was making restless motions with his feet and shoulders.

"Young man," said he, "if you will direct me I prefer to walk. My business is urgent. Curses on your ould country outfit!" he cried, breaking suddenly into a betraying accent. "To the divil with it!"

Brewster was simply crawling along under Kelsey's guidance. The next house was yet half a mile off. There was a wavering of the buggy, a sudden but not violent lurch, and Kelsey, who was quite prepared for the mishap, was standing beside the dilapidated vehicle, and holding out a solicitous hand to the stranger, who had slid into an undignified heap between the seat and the dashboard. Brewster stood like an equestrian statue.

"Hope you're not hurt, sir!" said Kelsey, courteously, helping the man, who was swearing volubly, onto his feet. "Let me fix the cushions here by the side of the road, right on this bank, and then I'll unharness, and ride bareback on to the next house and borrow their buckboard. It won't take long, sir!"

"A murrain on your blasted buggy!" roared the furious guest. "It's me own, only little girl I'm to get the night, me child that I've not laid eyes on since she was a mere infant in arms! I expected her to come afther me."

"I'll ride as fast as I can, sir, but I think, after all, it's better for me to go back to the store. There'll be a team there I can borrow. It's only a mile back."

The man grunted helplessly.

"What's the name of your little girl, if I may ask!" said Kelsey, as he divested Brewster of his harness.

"Shure an' it's Doris," answered the man. "She was named for me own grandmother!"

"Well, I didn't know that Doris Avery was Irish!" said Kelsey as he sprang lightly on Brewster's back, and was off.

"Fool that I am," muttered the man, seating himself impatiently. "Jule Grannis told me not to let a bit of the brogue slip away with me."

Kelsey galloped to the Corners, turned up the Ridge road, and urged Brewster kindly but steadily up the hill, allowing him a few stops for breath. "Thank heaven," he said, "it's a cloudy night and not a star. My friend will not venture to walk along a strange road."

Kelsey paused at the entrance of Mrs. Gilbert's grounds, leaped down and opened the carriage

gate, and then led Brewster around to the kitchen door. The servants were having their supper, and the coachman came to the door. "I'm from Deepfurrow Farm," said Kelsey, panting with excitement, "and have an important message for your lady. But first let me take a blanket for my horse, as he is dripping with sweat."

The coachman shouted for the stable boy, told him to rub down the horse, and blanket him, but he said to Kelsey, "It's doubtful if you can see the madam. She must never be disturbed after seven o'clock, and it's now quarter after."

"Kindly give me a paper and pencil then," said Kelsey, "and I'll send a note in to her. It's about the little girl—Doris, you know."

The coachman's heavy features lighted at once with interest. The servants were all fond of Doris and her pleasant ways. "May I hope nothing is wrong with the child?" said the coachman, while the cook and the upper housemaid turned to listen.

"No," said Kelsey, "thank you, but there may be, and right soon too."

He wrote hastily on the paper they brought him. "Doris will be taken away to-night on the midnight train from Ellsworth Junction by a man who pretends to be her father. Save her if you can."

A maid carried the note to Remsen, the nurse,

and almost immediately the drawing-room bell rang. Mrs. Gilbert wished to see Kelsey at once. He found her sitting before a fire of pine logs, dressed in white, and still wearing the green shade over her eyes.

"Tell me everything," she said, earnestly. And he did.

"I too have had my suspicions," she said, thoughtfully, "but we may both be wrong. However, I will send for Doris at once. Mrs. Wilde must continue to act a friendly part to the end, or lay herself open to an accusation of a crime. But all I want is to get secure possession of the child. Now, hurry back to your victim, and I will order the men to go to the Farm. If your fears are proven to be justified, you have certainly won my gratitude and friendship."

She had noted carefully Kelsey's speech and manner in spite of his working clothes.

He thanked her politely and withdrew from the room, and shortly was riding Brewster at a brisk pace down the wide street to the top of the hill. He went straight to Miss Graves. The post office was closed for the night, and she was knitting beside her green-shaded lamp.

"Miss Graves," cried Kelsey, as she responded to his rap, "will you lend me your buckboard and a harness? It's all worse than I thought, but I'll explain next time."

"Take anything on the place, Kelsey," said she, bustling to get a lantern and light it, and putting a shawl over her head to accompany Kelsey to the barn.

He talked pretty fast while he was harnessing Brewster. "I'm sure the man's an actor," he said. "He looks it, anyhow, and he's probably played the part of looking for a lost child. The Gilbert carriage will be at the farm nearly as soon as he is, anyhow."

Kelsey rattled off to find his man, and came upon him striding up and down the road, spouting "Othello," and quite a little the worse for whisky.

"You young rascal!" he shouted at Kelsey. "Why didn't you stay all night?"

"It was quite a chore," replied Kelsey, "to do all I had to do. Now jump in, sir, and we'll be there before you know it."

When Kelsey was well out of the way after his early supper, Mrs. Wilde had called Doris aside and said, "I've got a wonderful surprise for you, child. I had a letter last night from your own dear father, and he's coming to-night to see his little girl. I think he must be down at the store waiting for you, for he was to come up with Silas on the stage."

"My father?" said Doris, turning very pale, and grasping the back of a chair. "Why,

Mrs. Wilde, my father is dead. My mother said so."

"Of course, dear, she thought he was dead," wheedled Mrs. Wilde, "but it was some other man. There was some sort of a mix-up, a shipwreck or a railroad accident, I don't fully understand it myself, and now he's come to light, and you're not an orphan after all. Mrs. Grannis, that sent you here, has been writing for some time about it. He traced you as far as her, and then the rest is easy. Now put on your hat and coat and run down to the store, and if you see a rather tall man in a cape sittin' there, you ask him if his name's Avery, and bring him along, for he don't know the way here. Perhaps he'll stay and make us a visit before he takes you away with him."

"Takes—me—away!" repeated Doris in a dazed voice.

"Why, yes, of course. Don't little girls usually stay with their fathers? When Mrs. Gilbert asked you to go abroad we didn't none of us dream you had a father livin'. Probably he won't let her take you away from him, Doris."

Doris, trembling and faint, turned to get her hat and coat. "O, Mrs. Wilde," she half whispered, "I feel afraid somehow. Won't you come along with me?"

"Nonsense, Doris. Afraid of your own loving

father that has been lost so long? Now run along."

Doris was not afraid of the quiet country dark. There was the scent of early spring in the air, but she did not heed it. Her heart was beating like a hammer, her brain refused to think, and a terrible, smothering sense of terror of this man who was waiting for her possessed her wholly. Her footsteps lagged heavily, and when she finally reached the store, she was several minutes climbing the steps, and her eyes were large and staring as she peered first through the glass in the door. No one was there but a farmer or two, with chairs tilted back, and clay pipes in hand.

The clerk came forward as he saw Doris enter. "Do anything for you?" he inquired.

"There isn't a gentleman waiting here?" she asked, timidly.

"Wall, if that ain't hard lines on you an' me, Bill?" said one farmer, taking a long pull at his pipe.

"There was a stranger here who came up on the stage," replied the clerk, "but Kelsey Starr came after him."

"O!" said Doris, with a sense of relief, "then I'll go right back. Thank you."

"Who's the stranger, Charley?" asked the other farmer of the clerk. "Why didn't you put us wise, hey?"

"I happened to have too much of my own business to-night to mind other people's," he said, rather crossly, "and sure as I am in a hurry a half dozen people come after molasses on tap."

To tell the truth, Charley was very much put out that he had been too occupied as the sole person in charge to satisfy his own curiosity as to the man in the cape.

Doris returned to the house still greatly troubled. "I was sure my papa was dead," she said to herself. "That was why we were so poor, and my mother had to work so hard. If he had been alive, he would have worked and taken care of us. He died when I was a baby. She said so."

Mrs. Wilde let her in. It was evidently a great effort for her to be pleasant.

"Where is Mr. Avery?" she asked. Thaddeus, who had now been told of the expected visitor, stood just behind her.

"The gentleman was not in the store," said Doris. Something prompted her to keep Kelsey's name out of the affair.

"Not there! But he surely must have come. Did you ask or just look around?"

"I did both," said Doris. "He wasn't there."

"Well, I was going down anyhow, so perhaps I'd better try and look him up," said Mr. Wilde.

But Mrs. Wilde had her own reasons for wishing her family as little in evidence as possible. "Wait a while, Thaddeus," she said. "The gentleman may have taken a private hack from the Kent station and missed the way."

CHAPTER XII

THE ESCAPE

DORIS flew upstairs to try and collect her thoughts. Grandma had wept herself into a headache, and had gone to bed, but was not asleep. Doris knelt down beside her.

"O, Grandma," she said, "Mrs. Wilde says that my father is on the way to take me, and I'm sure it can't be true. Mother never told me much except that he was very good to her, and that he died when I was a baby. I know this must be the wrong man, but how can I make other people think so?"

Grandma sat right up in bed. "Doris," she said, "haven't you allus been talkin' to me about livin' in the House of Love, where nothin' bad couldn't tetch you? Have you moved out where you're goin' to be gobbled up? Now you chirk right up again!"

Doris was crying softly. "Of course," she said, "I'd rather have a really truly father, if he's a nice, kind father, than to go to Europe. But I feel as if there is something all wrong going on to-night. But it's as true as can be that nothing

can harm me, and I want to be brave. Yes, I will be brave. It's a shame to disturb you so, Grandma. Now you lie right down again, and I'll wring that cloth out in fresh, cold water and put it on your head."

"O that does feel good," said Grandma. "Now you sit there by the bed, and hold my hand, and sing soft and gentle, 'The King of Love my Shepherd Is.' That's a very comfortin' piece to me, Doris. I hadn't never took notice of it till you begun to sing it."

Doris sang the whole hymn, and her own fears subsided under the spell of the tender lines. Grandma had dropped asleep. There was a sudden commotion in the kitchen below. Doris heard the heavy voice of Thaddeus, the harsh tones of his wife, the shrill note of Aurelia in one inharmonious trio. She also heard a fourth voice outside at the gate, a powerful baritone singing a rollicking Irish ballad as only an Irishman could sing it. She hurried down the stairs, knowing that if she had to be called it would disturb Grandma. The outside door stood open, and the family were on the threshold.

"Steady, sir, steady!" she heard Kelsey saying, as he seemed to be assisting some one up the path.

"The top o' the mornin' to ye, me dears!" cried the visitor, reeling against the doorway. "Where

is me own little gurrl? Mavourneen, me darlint, do I see ye once more?" he cried, lurching toward Aurelia, who screamed and ran into the sitting room.

"Good evening, Mr. Avery!" said Mrs. Wilde, in a stern, commanding tone, intended to bring him to his senses.

"Avery, did you say, ma'am? Please your ladyship, me name's Michael O'Reilly, ma'am."

"What do you mean, sir, coming into a decent man's house in this condition?" said Thaddeus.

"Ah, sir, indade it's quite sober I am, sir!" said the new arrival, dropping heavily upon the nearest chair. "Only one little dhrop did I take while waitin' in the cowl'd for that boy of yours."

"What does this mean, Kelsey Starr?" inquired Mrs. Wilde, furiously.

"Only this, Mrs. Wilde. I stopped in at the store on my way—"

"What business had you to stop at the store or anywhere else? I started you out on a special errand."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Kelsey, calmly, "but I wanted something at the store and it would be too late when I got back. I found this—this—man sitting there waiting for some one from this house, so I told him I'd fetch him in the buggy. We lost off a wheel—"

"Then why didn't you walk?"

"I wouldn't leave Brewster, ma'am. I left this person by the side of the road—"

"You couldn't have led Brewster and both of you walked, could you?" blazed Abigail.

"I was rather rattled, ma'am, by the wheel coming off, it does upset one, you know, so I went and borrowed Miss Graves's buckboard, and by the time I came back to Mr. O'Reilly—"

"That's me name, sonny!" broke in Michael, slapping his knee.

"Why, I found that he had tried to pass away the time in emptying a whisky bottle."

"And a foine reception it was, ma'am," said the visitor, "to meet me with an ould nag that ain't fit to draw a hearse, an' thin to dump me out on the side of the road. I'm raisin' me price, ma'am. Fifteen dollars ain't much fer the distance an' me fare out, an' the tin more ye promised if I get off to-night ain't enough. Ye hear me, ma'am!" he cried, his mood changing from maudlin joviality to an ugly one.

Mrs. Wilde was terrified. Thaddeus, Kelsey, and Doris were all listening.

"I don't know what you mean about money, you drunken fool!" she said. "Mrs. Grannis wrote me that you were looking for your child, Doris Avery, and that you would come to-night to see her."

"I don't want the brat," said the man, rising.

"She's none of mine. But I'm willin' to take her to New York to-night as I agreed, if ye pay me another fifteen. I won't do it for tin. And I want something to ate too."

"Doris, bring some bread and cheese and cold meat," said Mrs. Wilde.

"O, Mrs. Wilde," whispered Doris, "you won't send me away with him, will you? He is not my father, he says so himself."

"There's some dreadful mistake, Doris," said Mrs. Wilde. "I've been deceived, terribly deceived. Of course I wouldn't think of letting you go with such a creature."

"Is that me long-lost infant?" leered Michael, stretching out his arms toward Doris, and recalling his role. "Come to me arms! Your broken-hearted father has searched every city on the earth for you, darlint!"

Abigail was quaking inwardly. She could make a plausible explanation to Thaddeus, but she was aware that Kelsey knew what made her liable to arrest.

He stood firmly and determinedly by the door with his eyes fixed steadily on her.

"Kelsey," she said, "you have Miss Graves's buckboard still there. Take this man to the Ellsworth Junction as soon as he finishes eating. He and Jule Grannis seem to have hatched a plot to kidnap Doris, and we've found it out in time."

"We have," said Kelsey, still looking piercingly at her.

Her bold eyes quailed under his glance, and she turned abruptly to make a cup of strong coffee.

"But not a step will I go without the fifteen dollars," said Mr. O'Reilly between mouthfuls.

"Well, this is the part I cannot understand, Thaddeus," said Mrs. Wilde, helplessly; "but isn't it better to humor his delusion and let him go as soon as possible?"

"I ain't got fifteen dollars in the house," said Thaddeus, gruffly.

"Well, I have," replied his wife, turning to go upstairs.

Just then the noise of hoofs and wheels came up the road. Kelsey's heart leaped at the longed-for and expected sound. Thaddeus arose and went to the door, and his wife followed. The carriage drew up at their gate.

"I believe it's the Gilbert turnout," said Thaddeus, peering out at the lamps. Mrs. Gilbert's footman came up to the door, and handed a note to Mrs. Wilde.

"She's sent for Doris to-night instead of to-morrow," said she, reading it hastily, and handing it to Thaddeus. "How strange!"

"You might as well let her go," said Thaddeus; "a few hours won't make much difference with you."

"It certainly is inconvenient," said Abigail, hating to succumb to the inevitable, and preparing to raise objections. In her heart she was crying, "I have failed, but give me twenty-four hours, and something can be done."

"Mrs. Wilde," said Kelsey, with a world of meaning in his quiet tone, and a keen light in his eyes which she fully comprehended, "it will be much better if you send Doris to-night."

"Is anyone out there in the coach?" asked Mrs. Wilde.

"The upper housemaid," replied the footman.

"No, you don't ride to the Ridge with Doris, my good woman," thought Kelsey, with a sarcastic glimmer about his mouth.

"Go up and get your clothes, Doris," said Mrs. Wilde. They were already folded in a pile, and even the paper and string ready. The Christmas picture had been replaced that very afternoon in its original wrappings. Grandma was still asleep. Doris bent over and kissed her gently. Then she went downstairs, shook hands with Mr. Wilde and his wife, bade good-by to Aurelia, and as Kelsey took her bundles followed him out to the carriage. She stopped an instant at the gate. "Kelsey," she said, "you've been a good friend to me, and I thank you. Come up and see me before I go away. And please say good-by to Miss Graves, if I don't see her at church."

"See here, little girl," said Kelsey, as he helped her into the carriage, "it may seem a strange request on my part, but don't you go anywhere alone. Stay close by Mrs. Gilbert until the boat leaves the dock."

When he returned to the house he saw Mrs. Wilde put a roll of bills into the hand of Michael O'Reilly, and a few moments later Brewster was traveling at a lively pace in the direction of the Junction, where the visitor was deposited an hour before train time. "See that this man gets off all right!" said Kelsey to the night watchman. "He's likely to fall asleep," for Michael had been nodding all the way. To Kelsey the long ride back was neither dark nor lonely. He had saved Doris.

She did not know that night nor for many weeks what he had done. She only knew that Mrs. Gilbert said she admired the lad, and would help him through college.

The Meldens and Courtneys were happy over the change that had come to the fortunes of Doris, and Miss Gladys Courtney remarked in Mrs. Gilbert's hearing, as she had said before on other occasions, "That child's face is familiar!"

"You know I have never yet seen it," replied Mrs. Gilbert, sadly.

They were walking along the garden path as they talked, and Silas Webb's wife, who was a sort of specialist in fine laundry work at the

Ridge, was spreading a fine, embroidered counterpane on the grass near by. Like Silas and Pepper she was a privileged character. She heard Miss Courtney's remark, and came forward.

"Begging your pardon, ladies," she said, respectfully, "Silas and me have been awful happy over the good fortune that has come to this child. Silas brought her up to the Corners the very night she come, and he said he was never so sorry for a human bein' as when he left her there. When I saw her I was pestered to pieces worryin' where I'd seen her face, and finally I found out. I just heard Miss Courtney wonderin' as I used to, so I've made bold to speak. You know I sometimes help the caretaker at the Manor, she's a second cousin of Silas's, and one day I was wipin' the portrait frames in the long gallery with a soft cloth, and I nearly fell over. It's early yet in the afternoon, an' the light's good. I'd advise Miss Courtney to run over there."

"Shall I go, Aunt Alice?" said Miss Courtney to Mrs. Gilbert.

"Certainly, my dear, and take Doris with you. She has never seen the old house."

So they walked down the street, and up the elm-shaded drive of the Manor, and in response to Miss Courtney's ring were admitted and conducted up the long staircase to the upper hall on which the portrait gallery opened.

Down the long line of cavaliers and statesmen and scholars they passed, with the spring sunshine dancing on the likenesses of features long obliterated in vault or sarcophagus beyond the sea. Here and there some noble dame looked haughtily or archly forth from the canvas, splendid in satin and jewels.

"Look, look, Doris!" said Miss Courtney, stopping at the far end of the hall, and pointing to a girlish but elegant figure in white, with large gray eyes looking out from beneath a broad, plumed hat. "This is the celebrated portrait of Lady Doris Clifford, who was once a guest here, and ran away and married a parson, and a Methodist at that. How strange that you should be the image of her, and have the same name too! Your eyes and nose and mouth and chin are the same. Her cheeks are fuller, and the eyebrows heavier, but yours will be the same in time!"

"I'm sure that the name Clifford was in my mother's Bible," said Doris, "on the leaf that is missing. I could not make out much of it, but it looked like that."

"What a pity about that leaf!" said Miss Courtney. "You remember you were expecting to show it to me when you discovered your loss. It may have been loose and have fallen out. Now let us go and tell Mrs. Gilbert about the portrait."

As they passed out through the lower hall Miss

Courtney paused at the portrait of Mrs. Allston, who was Anne Waverley. At her knee stood her little son, a sturdy, handsome fellow. "Dr. Allston mourns for her still," said Miss Courtney, "and will not stay here. It seems a crime to keep this grand, beautiful old place closed. We are hoping that Robert will feel the call of the blood, and make it his home. He is nearly twenty-one now, and the only heir."

Only a few days more and Doris stood on the deck of an ocean liner and watched the coast line of her native land vanish from sight. Many changes were to come before she would sail into New York harbor. Mrs. Gilbert had become very dear to her, but nevertheless the child felt a deep sense of loneliness, a longing for some one of her very own. Without family, without home, dependent on the bounty of a stranger, her heart cried out for the mother-love of the past. "But it isn't past, it's now," she reasoned in her quaint way, "for love never changes nor dies. It's always Now in the House of Love. God had this trip to Europe put away for me when I was riding up that long hill with Silas, and the really belonging to somebody must be somewhere in the House. My, the House of Love is lots and lots bigger than I thought," she mused, as she turned and viewed the great tossing expanse that stretched away to the horizon.

Remsen had made Mrs. Gilbert quite comfortable in a steamer chair, and came to find Doris. "Your chair is there," she said, pointing next to the Madam's. "She wants to speak with you."

"Doris," said Mrs. Gilbert, laying her hand on the child's, "you will recall that when Kelsey Starr came to say good-bye to you we had a conversation in the library before we sent for you."

"Yes, Mrs. Gilbert."

"Well, Kelsey brought me a wonderful piece of news, dear. It seems the day after you left the Wildes', he was transplanting lettuce from the cold frames into the garden. He was working close to the stone wall, and he noticed a half sheet of letter paper lodged in a crevice in the wall in such a way that it had been protected from the weather, and there was writing on it. He drew it from its hiding place, and was able to read easily in Mrs. Wilde's own bold hand what appeared to be a copy from the fly-leaf of an old Bible. I have it here now in my hand-bag. When Gladys Courtney had seen your almost perfect resemblance to the portrait of Lady Doris Clifford, she was lamenting that the only other clue to your identity was a page that had been lost from your Bible. It is evident to me now that Mrs. Wilde removed that page, and probably destroyed it, else why should she have made this copy? How this escaped her keeping will always

remain a mystery, but we need not worry our heads about that part. It is enough that the necessary information has come to light. I am well grounded in the Waverley history, and possess copies of all the old records. Therefore I know that the Lady Doris, who visited at the Manor more than a century ago, was not only the intimate friend of the Lady Waverley of that day, but was the first cousin to Mr. Gramerton, her husband, from whose brother Philip I am directly descended. I was drawn to you, Doris, because of your lovely voice, your sweet spirit, and pleasant manners. I next found that you have a good mind. But now that I know you are my little kinswoman, you are nearer and dearer. I want you to call me Aunt Alice. Why don't you speak, girlie?"

Doris was struggling with a flood of emotion. She seemed to be drowning in pure joy. At last she found her voice. "O, Mrs. Gilbert"—that lady raised a warning finger—"Aunt Alice, I mean, do I really belong, really?"

"Yes, Doris, you belong to the Ridge, to the Waverleys, and to me!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE TIDAL WAVE

TEN years later, one mild spring afternoon, the Allstons, father and son, were walking slowly in the English Garden in Munich. They came to the rocks that overlook the impetuous stream diverted from the Isar that loses none of the energy of the parent river, and sat down under the trees, idly watching the ducks that dare to come to the very edge of the little fall, and then when about to be swept over it, spread their wings triumphantly and fly to safety.

"Canny creatures!" said Dr. Allston. "How strange that they can appreciate a risk and get fun out of it!"

"To think also," replied Robert, "of their cool calculation of those wings as an asset when the critical moment comes." Then after a moment he added, half seriously, half smilingly, "Poor old dad, you've been fearful sometimes that I mightn't find mine in time, *nicht wahr?* But here we are to-day, safe and sound."

"Yes, here we are!" replied his father, with

an involuntary sigh of happiness and relief, such as a long storm-beaten mariner might utter as his feet touched the solid earth of the home shore. Their eyes met in an understanding glance full of mutual affection and good comradeship.

Dr. Allston had been infinitely patient with his lad, and had held him by a long, not too taut rope of love and sympathy, waiting for him to find himself. Robert Allston had too many aptitudes and talents to discover himself easily, but through all the years between the university days and the present his father had been wise, calm, and congenial enough to preserve the invaluable post of chum, confidant, and friend. Robert's experiments with life had been numerous and varied. He was a vital, magnetic, generous, enthusiastic fellow, with a nature both practical and idealistic, sensitive to color and music, but with capacity for hard work, equaled by his ability to fling care to the four winds. Wild oats of the baser sort did not appeal to his innate fineness and self-respect, but his mind was so many-sided and he touched life responsively at so many points, that he wanted to rush down any one of a dozen different and equally alluring highways to some distant and hazy goal. Poverty would have soon forced him to a decision, but a large fortune gave time for experience.

At last there came a day under the spell of a

long and leisurely tour in Italy that he became sure that the world of art was calling for the consecration of his ideals and energies. Dr. Allston stood by while a studio was fitted up in Florence, talked, ate, walked and smoked the Italian Renaissance, leaned for hours over the rampart on the hill of San Miniato on starlit nights when the "archangel's tent" and Giotto's tower of spiritualized marble seemed to guard the "Lily of the Arno." Later, not very much later, he was present at the auction of easels, tapestries, old armor, a convent altar, and other properties, which sale brought the episode to a close.

Next came the Era of Music. Robert had played passably well on the piano for many years, and had exercised a pleasing baritone in the college glee club and on social occasions. Now he threw himself heart and soul into vocal and instrumental lessons with the most noted instructors on the Continent. He bought the lives of all the famous composers and singers, apotheosized Beethoven, fought tooth and nail for Richard Wagner, let his hair grow over the collar of his velveteen jacket, patronized Bohemian cafés, and composed a sonata in B minor. It was during this last creative obsession that Dr. Allston's endurances became acutely painful. Robert was distraught, frowned much, lost his sense of the ludicrous, hummed constantly, did finger

exercises on the tablecloth and backs of chairs, and was deaf to questions. The sonata died a natural death, and Robert emerged from his dream of distinction. This was in Paris.

Dr. Allston took breath, enjoyed the old Robert once more, alert, witty, genial, but with a better command of voice and a more brilliant technique than when the fad struck him. Then came a fatal day when Robert wrote a magazine story that was accepted, promptly printed, and paid for handsomely. That settled it forevermore! Literature! Now came the Era of Ink. A study in Berlin, shelves splendid with reference books in calf and morocco, a typewriting machine, various styles of fountain pens, reams of snowy paper, a bust of Goethe, Balzac, Shakespeare, and a desk so handsome and convenient that just to own it would seem to induce "the spark from heaven" to fall on its possessor. Robert's next story came back six times. Dr. Allston could see the end and took courage. Robert began a novel, but there seemed to be no plot in the universe left for him to handle. The fire of genius leaped, flickered, and went out. There was a private sale, and tickets purchased for Tibet. This was in Berlin.

These fervent episodes were only interludes in travel, for the Allstons went everywhere. Year after year, Dr. Allston hoped that his son would

see in his uncommon endowment of wealth, leisure, culture, and social station a vast opportunity to respond to the cry of tortured, burdened, ignorant humanity. It was for this that he was a willing exile in nearly every land under the sun. When the young fellow began to observe political and social conditions, comparing country with country, race with race, with a fresh, kindling interest, his father saw a beam of hope. But then followed the most trying period of all. Robert became fascinated with rationalistic German philosophy, and read greedily until he could argue glibly against the fundamental tenets of the Christian religion, and seemed to throw overboard all that his fathers had held sacred, and to set his face like a flint. But one day on a side trip in Africa their way brought them to a village where they were put up over night by an American missionary and his wife, two radiant souls dwelling among Negroes, who did not talk to their guests about their love for the Christ and their faith in him, but who glowed with it and triumphed in it, two university graduates pouring out love unstinted to these uncivilized and ignorant ones, teaching them to work with their hands, to read, to be clean, to know the true God. They showed the Allstons the carpenter shop, the schoolhouse, the little chapel, and that night there was a very simple

service, and in that service young Allston, who had listened unmoved to eloquent presentations of Christianity from the most dominating pulpits of the world, heard under that thatched roof the cry of the Other Man, which is the call of God. When they left the next day the Allstons told the missionaries that they would be responsible for the erection of the small hospital so much needed, and so, blessing and trebly blessed, they went on their way.

Robert was now fired with eagerness to get to work. They had not left Capetown before that work had begun to take shape, and many a mile the father and son traversed on the wide decks of the steamer during the long voyage northward. Robert would study social economy and systematized, applied philanthropy, the first in the universities, the second, in the great cities. He would also master the details of the woolen business from the sheep to the marketable goods. Then he would be ready to build a great mill in Kent and introduce the most improved methods of manufacture and the most favorable conditions for the employees.

All this would take years, and it did. On this afternoon in Munich most of the patient, preparatory work lay behind Robert. He was nearly thirty years old. In June the lectures in the University of Munich would be finished, there would

be a walking trip in the Tyrol, and then the return to Waverley Ridge, the opening of the old house, and a winter of study of plans, ways, and means.

Now as the two sat quietly on the rocks, the subject of the home-going came uppermost. Robert had not been in the United States for several years, but Dr. Allston had made an annual trip to look after their business interests and to keep an eye on the Manor House.

"Are you quite sure, dad," asked Robert with solicitude, "that it is not going to be hard for you to open up the house and live there with me?"

"I can't say it will not be, Bob, but my joy in you has softened the old, old sorrow over the loss of your dear mother. One thing would comfort me immeasurably, and that would be to see you wedded to a woman in every sense your mate, and to hear your children's feet on the stairs, your children's voices in the halls."

Robert's so-called love affairs had partaken of the variety and number of his other essays at finding himself. These had not been the least of Dr. Allston's troubles. The athletic girl, the musical girl, the B.A. girl, the butterfly, the trained nurse, and the settlement worker had marked various stages of Robert's history. He had never been "engaged" since he was a senior in high school, but he had often been perilously near it, and Dr. Allston's cure had always been

the profoundest interest and then—railroad and steamer tickets, tickets to Sydney, to the South Sea Islands, to the Land of the Midnight Sun, anywhere, so long as it was far enough away. Twice the long journeys themselves had developed cases of propinquity that had to be dealt with with a tact and diplomacy on the father's part that would have sufficed to settle a delicate international dispute with brilliant success. For two or three years now Robert had been too busy to care for girls, and had reached the age of deliberation, and knowing that he would be quite miserable now with any one of the girls who had caught his fancy in the past, he naturally feared that one whom he might choose at thirty would not suit him at forty, and had become so hypercritical that Dr. Allston began to apprehend an increasing hesitation which might finally become a fixed determination to go on by himself. The subject was rarely mentioned now between them, and to-day the father spoke with such deep feeling that Robert was unwontedly touched, and replied without his usual attempt to fence.

"Dad, I hope for your sake at least that your dreams will come true; but the woman whom I marry is not coming to me along the usual lines of long acquaintance and a gradually increasing sense of my need of her and fondness for her. She must come as a swift, sudden, resistless up-

lifting inspiration, not a summer dawn before the sunrise. I want to be taken off guard as by a tidal wave, swept from my feet, submerged, blinded, half-drowned, borne up to safety and peace, to come to my calm self with my head in her lap, and the consciousness of infinite completion, a perfect comradeship for spirit, mind, and body."

His eyes grew bright as he talked, clasping one knee with both hands, and looking straight ahead.

Dr. Allston smiled somewhat sadly, and said, "You're not asking much of the gods, are you, Bob?"

"That remains to be seen," Robert answered. Then drawing out his watch he said: "It is only an hour before the performance. There are no reserved seats, you know." They rose simultaneously, and retraced their steps to the entrance, hailed a taxi, and were soon speeding down the beautiful Prinzregentenstrasse. Just ahead of them, across the Isar, the Peace Angel blazed in the late sunshine on the top of her lofty monument, one of Munich's numerous beautiful fountains playing at the base of the shaft. They did not cross the massive bridge with its colossal sculptures, but turned, keeping along the border of the river. Shortly they arrived at the great Protestant Church of Saint Luke, dismissed the chauffeur, and made their way to seats in the mid-

dle of the vast auditorium. It was the week before Holy Week, and a musical society were to render Bach's "The Passion according to Saint Matthew." The church was almost ugly in its bareness. There was absolutely no appeal to the senses. The mighty sword of the Reformation, ruthlessly divorcing art from religion, failed to recognize the need of the human heart for beauty, and that "in His temple everything saith, Glory."

"How true it is that spirituality cannot be forced," remarked Dr. Allston, looking about. "Taking away beauty to promote spirituality, has often worked to make people narrow, sordid, intolerant, and—"

"Intolerable!" added Robert, as his father paused, his eyes caught by a face amid the throng of people who were crowding into the church.

"Bob," said he, "I believe there is Mrs. Gilbert, of Waverley Ridge. Yes, it is she! Don't you see that fine, regal-looking woman in gray—snow-white hair, large, dark eyes, splendid set of the head on shoulders? I have hardly seen her for years, and when I did see her at the Ridge a long time ago, she could not see me because of some trouble with her eyes. They seem to be all right now, as she is reading the program. When we have been at the Ridge it has only been for a day, and she is abroad a good share of the time. We must speak with her after the oratorio."

The organ and the singers were in the high gallery behind the congregation. The word "audience" hardly seems appropriate to this occasion, for to most people the listening is less a critical attention to the rendition of an immortal work of genius than an act of profound worship. The great organ was supplemented by an orchestra of sympathetic strings.

"Come, ye daughters," sang the chorus, "come, share my anguish. See him, the Bridegroom, a Lamb is he." This to a marvelous sobbing accompaniment that sobs on during the slow, sustained notes of the soprano, the latter maintaining its distinct message above the agitation of the first chorus, and the vehement questioning—"Whom?" "How?" "What?" of the insistent second chorus, and addresses the suffering Saviour,

"O Lamb of God, most holy, the bitter cross under-
going.

The sins of man thou'rt bearing,
Else would we be despairing."

The favorite part of the Allstons throughout the entire work was the alto solos, both men being especially fond of the lower tones in a woman's voice. To-day they awaited the first alto solo with much anticipation, and when the recitative, "O Blessed Saviour!" and the following aria, "Grief and Pain" were given with exquisite tone

and artistic finish but with absolute lack of warmth and real tenderness, the two men exchanged a look of disappointment, and not even the majestic chorale, "The Sorrows Thou art Bearing," nor the wonderful tenor solo, "I would beside my Lord be watching," compensated them. Later, borne along in the surges of the mighty turmoil of the chorus, "Behold, my Saviour now is taken," they forgot all else but the fierce remonstrance of the Master's followers, "Have lightnings and thunders in clouds disappeared?" and the savage impetus of the mob bent on its bloody desire.

During the pause after the First Part, Robert said in an undertone to his father, "I am positively rebellious about that alto singer. She is made of ice. She did not forget herself nor her art for one instant. There is nothing so tender in the whole work as that No. 61, 'If my tears be unavailing,' and I would almost rather forfeit the whole of the Second Part than to hear that heartless creature sing that solo."

"I feel as you do," replied Dr. Allston. "Still we cannot afford to miss the other numbers. Let us stay."

They little knew that even as they talked the singer in question was being rapidly rushed in a taxi to meet a dinner engagement, and that another young lady had taken the vacant seat in the

quartet. Part Second opens with the alto solo, "Ah, now is my Saviour gone." Robert had folded his arms, sitting very erect, and frowning somewhat, to brace himself for the ordeal. But what was this? What magical change had come over that flawless, smooth, well-rounded voice? Those five opening measures on the one syllable, "Ah!" the one tone F sharp, with the exquisite delicacy of the accompaniment as its only relief, had become a deep well of adoring love. Robert caught his breath. The voice went on, "Ah, now is my Saviour gone." Here was art in its perfection, but here was also a passionate appreciation, a self-forgetful devotion that throbbed in every note. The chorus intervene with their interrogation, and then again that thrilling, mellow, appealing voice, "Is it possible? Is it possible?" Robert almost resented the necessary measures of the chorus. He was impatient for that soul-cry at the end of the number. Soon it came, every note a tear:

"Ah! how shall I find an answer,
When my anxious soul shall ask me?
Ah!—where is my Saviour gone?"

People were wiping their eyes and cheeks freely and unashamed. Robert clutched his coat sleeves, and felt the pressure of his father's arm on his side, but did not look at him nor unfold his

arms. One tenor solo after another, a magnificent chorale, and a mighty chorus fell unheeded on his ears. He only knew that they were making way for No. 48, the alto aria, "Have mercy, Lord, on me." At last it came, and the woman on his left was shaken with silent weeping. As the voice ceased it seemed to Robert that he must cry aloud in the intensity of his emotion. Still he sat like a statue until No. 61 was reached: "If my tears be unavailing, take the very heart of me."

O the yearning sweetness, the absolute surrender in that voice! He felt his father turn slightly to meet his glance, but he could not respond. One of life's rapturous experiences had taken possession of him. He would have been glad to rush out of the church, but he could not crowd by the people and disturb their enjoyment. He sat until the last word had died away in peace. Dr. Allston turned at once to him.

"Gloriously given!" he said, enthusiastically. "Why, Bob, are you ill? You are as white as a ghost!"

"Not ill at all," answered Robert, avoiding his eyes, "but let's get out as soon as possible."

"I had thought to intercept Mrs. Gilbert," said the doctor. "She was a dear friend of your mother in her girlhood."

"All right, dad. Do so by all means, but please

excuse me this time. I'll be around to the hotel shortly."

Mrs. Gilbert had remained standing in her place, as if waiting for some one. Dr. Allston also stood until the streams of people had dwindled into a few stragglers. Mrs. Gilbert caught his eye, recognized him, bowed cordially, and moved to meet him as she saw him start in her direction. They clasped hands gladly.

"Dr. Allston!" she said. "How delightful to meet you here!"

"How well you are looking, Mrs. Gilbert!"

"Yes, I am well, and enjoying a new lease of life. I doubt if anyone really appreciates this beautiful world unless, like myself, the eyes have been bandaged for months. I was cured several years ago, but have never become used to the joy and gratitude."

A tall, slender girl with a lovely face and graceful manner came up to Mrs. Gilbert just then. Her eyes were shining as with some unusual excitement. "Dr. Allston," said Mrs. Gilbert, "my adopted niece, Miss Avery, is with me here. I want you to know each other."

"Most happy, I assure you," replied the doctor courteously, bending over the slender white-gloved hand that Doris extended to him.

The three passed out together, Dr. Allston waxing eloquent over his pleasure in the oratorio,

and especially in the very unusual alto who had surpassed any he had ever heard.

"The old adage declares that it is never safe to change horses in midstream, but I must say that to-day the change was altogether for the better. It must have been sudden, as the name of the substitute did not appear on the program."

"No, it was all prearranged, I understand," answered Doris, "but the second singer is an American girl, and there were reasons why she did not wish to have her name appear."

"Do you know her?"

"Aunt Alice knows her," replied Doris.

"Is Robert here?" asked Mrs. Gilbert, deftly turning the subject.

"O, yes, Bob is finishing at the University in good shape. He is almost ready now to get to work at home."

"And will you return to the Ridge to live, and open up the dear old house?"

"Yes, Alice."

"I am glad, Tom. I'm sure that Anne would have wished it. No, thank you, we don't require a taxi, it is only a pleasant walk to our hotel—the Four Seasons, you know."

"Well, we're at the Bayerischer Hof, so if you have no objection, I will walk on with you. One really is in danger of not getting enough exercise where autos are so numerous and so reasonable."

"We are planning a pedestrian tour in the Tyrol in August," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Why, so are we," replied Dr. Allston. "Can't we make it a party? It will be the last trip Bob and I will have together over here for a long time to come. We sail for home the first of October."

"Well, come and call on us, you and Robert, and we will talk it over."

When Mrs. Gilbert and Doris were alone in their sitting room, the former said: "My dear, you sang like an angel! It was very hard for me not to tell Dr. Allston. I came very near it, child."

"But please do keep it a while yet, Aunt Alice. You know we agreed that nobody should know about my voice until we get back to the Ridge. I do love surprises."

Robert had left the church, flung himself into the first automobile he could get, and had bidden the chauffeur drive anywhere out into the country. The machine brought up at the Lake of Starnberg. Robert bethought him of his father, telephoned to the hotel that he would be in later, sat down at a little corner table in a café, and faced the situation. He was astonished, perplexed, dizzy, rebellious, but thrilling nevertheless with the revelation the day had brought. Who was the girl? He imagined her as rather below medium height, and with very dark eyes and hair.

Perhaps her face might not be beautiful, and he adored beauty. But her soul was so beautiful it must shine through her face, even as it expressed itself in her voice. How could he find her? There had been no name on the program. He would somehow get an interview with the director of the orchestra, a celebrated pianist. He ordered supper because he must, but hardly saw it when it was brought, and ate without thinking anything about it. What if the voice belonged to a married woman, or to a girl whose love had already been gained and pledged! It would mean life-long loneliness, unsatisfied soul-hunger, unattainable ideals to him. He called for his check, consulted a time-table, found he could just catch a train into Munich, and was thankful for a compartment to himself.

At ten-thirty he walked into the large room at the hotel which he used as sleeping-room and study combined. His father's room opened out of it. Dr. Allston heard him open the corridor door and came to meet him.

"Dad," said Robert, smiling wanly, "it's no use! The tidal wave has come!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE VIOLIN

THE next day came a note from Mrs. Gilbert inviting the Allstons to supper that night. It had come just before the one o'clock dinner that the father and son always took together, after the morning lecture at the University.

"Of course I accepted," said the doctor. "The Dienstmann was waiting."

"Accepted for both of us?" asked Robert, gloomily.

"Certainly," replied his father. "I could not think you would not be willing to go."

"But, dad, I'm in no mood to adapt myself to these ladies, who are strangers to me. I have made an appointment at four to see the director at his studio. If I find that the singer is to be approached through proper introduction, you can readily believe that I might be bursting forth with a pæan of joy in the midst of some grave discussion on the municipal government. Or if, on the contrary, it is made clear that I am up against a stone wall—well, my presence would

add gloom to a coal mine. Can't you get me out of this supper scrape?"

"I suppose I can send a second note and state that on seeing you I learned that your plans for the day were such that it would be difficult for you to accept the invitation. I'm sorry, Bob, because the ladies are unusually charming. Mrs. Gilbert's niece, an adopted niece, I believe, is one of the loveliest girls I have come across in years."

"Don't talk of girls, dad. There's only one girl now and henceforth. She has come right to the very heart of me."

"What do you say to walking over to the Hof-Garten for our coffee?" asked his father, pushing back his plate of nut-shells.

"All right," replied Robert, indifferently. "The day is so mild there will be plenty of people to watch, and that always interests you. Human nature in the abstract has no appeal to me to-day. I'm only existing for the clock to strike four."

They sat long under the trees, sipping their coffee, and commenting leisurely on the life about them, and at a quarter of four walked out into the Platz and crossed it, turning down a narrow but important thoroughfare where a popular music-dealer rented his upper floors to instructors on the piano or for practice rooms for students not allowed to do their work in the pensions or hotels. At the street door Robert paused a second, turn-

ing a trifle to take leave of his father. Dr. Allston reached out his hand and gave Robert's a strong, vital grip, that spoke volumes, and each nodded to the other, and separated without a word.

Robert found the great musician in the studio, was cordially received, but firmly refused the name of the soloist.

"She sang," said the director, "as a special favor to me, and I promised her not to print her name on the program, nor to tell her identity. She wished no publicity. You would not desire me to break my word."

"But, Herr Professor, please tell me this," said Robert earnestly. "Is she a married lady?"

The Professor's eyes smiled, although his mouth was grave as he replied in the negative. Robert's own eyes were flaming. "Is she affianced?" he asked.

The Professor took a sheet of music from a stand, and looking down, rolled and unrolled it with his long, thin, nervous fingers. "Not that I know of," he said, calmly.

"A thousand pardons, Herr Professor, yet once more! Does she live here in München?"

Again he waited a few seconds. "It is not her home," he answered, slowly, "but I think she is still here."

Robert rose to go, walked to the door, which

the Professor politely opened for him, but just as he was about to step over the threshold the Professor halted him by that kindly smile in his eyes. "There is a way," said he. The case appealed to his innate sentiment. He liked this broad-shouldered, straightforward, manly fellow with the clear, open glance. He sympathized with him. The girl was his favorite piano pupil and he felt that it might be for her welfare to meet this man. But he would be absolutely true to his promise to her. He only said, and this time his mouth shared in the smile as he queried, "Can the gentleman have forgotten that there are many Blumen-Halle in the city?"

"Flowers!" exclaimed Robert. "Of course. But how can I send them?"

"Send them to me," replied the Professor with ardor. "I will direct the messenger to the proper address."

Robert turned and grasped the Professor's two hands.

His hotel was only two blocks away, but he hailed a taxi. He could not get there quickly enough. Even electricity was far too slow. He strode through the vestibule and into the writing room, wrote a brief letter of thanks to the Professor, and in it inclosed his card within a smaller envelope, writing on the back of the card, "Thanking you for the pleasure you gave me yes-

terday in the Lucaskirche, and wondering if I may have the honor of expressing my appreciation in person."

Then he whirled away to the most fashionable florists in München, and had soon selected two dozen glorious, long-stemmed pink roses, and had seen them laid carefully in a box with his letter, and dispatched to the studio. He went out and walked miles, often consulting his watch, with mental comments like the following:

"By this time they must have reached her. Perhaps she is not at home. Perhaps she will not be at home until supper time. Maybe not then. She might have gone out for tea and then to the opera. It begins to-night at five-thirty. It's the Valkyrie. Possibly she is at home, has opened the box, has taken out the roses, has buried her face in them!"

At six o'clock he found himself out near Bavaria and her lions by the exhibition grounds. "Thank heaven, I'm out of that tiresome supper!" he exclaimed aloud, as there was no one near. "I don't even want to talk to dear old dad to-night." Later he wandered back to his hotel, had some supper, and was apparently deep in a book when his father came in from his visit.

"You certainly missed it, Bob," said the doctor with enthusiasm. "I haven't had such a delightful time in years. You would have enjoyed the

conversation, and I am sure would have considered Miss Avery quite ahead of any girl of your acquaintance."

Robert frowned and shook his head. "You forget, father," said he.

"Pardon me, Bob, but I did forget, the whole affair seems so visionary, and my evening's pleasure was very real. I only longed for you to be there with me. Miss Avery must have some very devoted admirer, for I have never seen more wonderful roses than stood in a Nymphenburg jar in the sitting room. And by the way, Bob, it was like a bit of real home life to be in that room. They have occupied it for several years, and have banished the heavy red, blue, and green German things, and fitted it up in genuine American fashion. Our supper was brought up there."

It was the first time in the years of comradeship that Dr. Allston had seemed to fail in sympathy, and Robert resented it keenly, and looked his displeasure. "But, Bob," said his father, "I would like to know how you got on with the Professor."

"I don't think you care a pfennig," said Robert. "Your head is filled with these Americans."

"And yours with another American," replied the doctor.

Robert lifted his head quickly. "How do you know that?" he asked.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that Miss Avery knows who your fair singer is, but did not feel at liberty to tell her name. She said she is a countrywoman of ours."

"She knows *her*?"

"Yes; we talked again of the oratorio, and I asked her particularly about the alto soloist. She says that the girl is a pupil of the same German teacher as herself."

"And I ran away from that supper! Dad, when do you call?"

"I would have gone to-morrow, as I asked the ladies out for tea, but they are leaving for Bozen early in the morning for a couple of weeks."

The next afternoon brought a note from the Professor, stating that he had received a note from the young lady in question, wishing him to thank Herr Allston for the beautiful flowers, but regretting that it would be inconvenient for her to receive him, as she was about to leave Munich. "Try Bozen," added the Professor.

"The grand old brick!" exclaimed Robert. "Dad, why can't we make a week-end at Bozen? There's some good climbing."

"It is barely possible that Alice Gilbert will write," he replied. "I would hardly like to seem to follow the ladies uninvited."

But the next week came a sprightly letter from Mrs. Gilbert suggesting the week-end. "It has

been so refreshing," she said, "to meet some one from home."

Friday night saw the arrival of the two men. Robert was not so completely lost in his own project to fail to notice how unwontedly cheerful his father had been on the journey down. "What has come over the dear old boy?" he asked himself. "And as sure as taxes, if he hasn't a brand-new gray suit!"

They had engaged rooms at a hotel across from the more quiet pension where the ladies had chosen to stay, but after supper they went over and sent up their cards.

"You'll lose your heart to Doris Avery," whispered his father as they waited a few moments in the salon.

"It is no longer mine to lose," said Robert with dignity, "but I will surely find out all she knows about my singer."

The ladies now entered, Mrs. Gilbert stately but radiant in trailing black velvet and diamonds, and Doris all in white with no jewels. She needed none but her eyes. Robert caught his breath as she approached. It was she who knew the secret that he would willingly give his fortune to discover! The ladies were carrying evening wraps. "I have several tickets for Miss Craft's concert in your hotel to-night," said Mrs. Gilbert. "Of course, you like ourselves are proud

to have such an American girl prominent in the Munich Hoftheater. Her lovely voice, artistic acting, and modest, refined personality have endeared her to many."

"She deserves every atom of the success that has come to her," said Doris. "I once heard a man say that he took every opportunity he could to hear Fräulein Craft, because of the inspiration she is to his character. To think how that slender, delicate little creature has persevered through all obstacles and made her way to wide recognition and respect as an artist and a woman! I love her!"

"I regret not to have been able to forestall you on the tickets," said Dr. Allston to Mrs. Gilbert, "but this is the first I have heard of the concert."

"And I am sorry to shorten your call," she replied, "but we can visit between numbers."

"Shall we talk French?" said Robert to Doris. "Mine is getting so rusty in Munich."

"Mine too," she replied. "We were not allowed to speak anything else in Lausanne, for all practical purposes, but I am much out of practice. I will be glad to brush it up."

From the first moment they found themselves congenial, but differing enough in their viewpoints on some subjects to lend piquancy to the conversation. The American prima donna scored a success, and held an impromptu reception at the

close of the concert, and Dr. Allston and Mrs. Gilbert bore her off triumphantly for ices in the dining salon of the hotel, Robert and Doris following closely.

"By the way," said he, nonchalantly, "I understand that the alto singer at the Bach oratorio is an American? Do you know her personally?" Doris flushed a trifle.

"Yes, I know her," she replied, quietly.

"Could you arrange to introduce me, Miss Avery?"

"That is hardly within my power, Mr. Allston. I understand that she wishes for the present to remain unknown."

Robert frowned and bit his lip. He did not see a mischievous sparkle in the eyes of his companion. "Miss Avery," he said with determination, abandoning the French he had used all the evening and speaking in his mother tongue, "it is impossible that you can know what this refusal means to me. I have had information that she is probably here in Bozen. Is that true?"

"I think my aunt has seen her since we came," replied Doris.

The concert had closed so early, according to the sensible German custom, that it was easy to consider a climb for the next morning, and the quartet were to meet immediately after breakfast, and follow an easy trail up to the vantage point

of two thousand feet where they could command a magnificent view of the snowy mountains.

"Alice," said Dr. Allston, as he walked across the road to the pension with Mrs. Gilbert, "if you can possibly induce the young lady who sang in the Lucaskirche to make her identity known to us, will you kindly do so? Robert has heard she is here."

"Yes, she is here," she replied with a queer tremolo in her voice. "I'll do my best to-morrow."

That night Mrs. Gilbert and Doris sat long before their green porcelain stove, in which a wood-fire was burning.

"Doris, you are contrary," said Mrs. Gilbert, with a shade of unprecedented annoyance in her tone. "The man is obsessed by the intangible image of the owner of that voice. He is restless, tantalized, unhappy. Why can't I tell him the truth?"

"Aunt Alice, I feel that he must love me, and not my voice. He must love me so much for myself that the fact that I can or cannot sing will not make any difference."

"But it naturally would make a difference. Think of his pleasure, his pride."

"No, Aunt Alice, pardon me, but suppose that he has, as you say, become infatuated with my voice, and that I might lose the use of it, as so often occurs, am I to be made miserable by the

knowledge that I no longer possess the power to hold his affection? If he grows to care so much for me that he is willing to give over his search for the singer, then I have something on which to build."

"You have always been unique, Doris," replied Mrs. Gilbert, still slightly irritated, "but in this matter, of course, I cannot interfere. He is a splendid fellow. Any girl might be proud to know him."

"I admire and like him very much," said the girl, frankly. "I will be glad of his friendship. You will keep my secret, Aunt Alice."

"Certainly, child."

The next morning was a glory of blue and white and green and gold, cloudless skies, towering, radiant peaks, slopes of fresh, tender green enameled with spring flowers, and sunshine everywhere, unstinted floods of it. The four were all experienced travelers, not easily to be profoundly stirred, but that morning the world seemed new-created. The air was so clear and pure and life-giving that even the older people seemed to throw off any sense of bodily effort as they slowly ascended the mountain path, and beheld wider and wider vistas of the glorious landscape, like the Revelator's city of vision, "adorned as a bride for her husband."

Robert had started somewhat moodily, evi-

dently with an effort to make himself agreeable. He kept close to Mrs. Gilbert for a while, leaving Doris to the delighted Dr. Allston. Having prevailed on Mrs. Gilbert to rest on a wooden bench beside the path, although she declared she was not at all tired, he sat down beside her, and with transparent tact brought around the subject that was on his mind.

"Father says, Mrs. Gilbert, that it may be possible for you to present us to the singer we are so eager to meet."

"You have asked a hard thing," she replied, marking diagrams on the ground with her alpenstock. "The lady is determined to remain incognito."

"I've a mind to break my stick, like the unsuccessful suitor in the 'Marriage of the Virgin,'" said Robert. "But you have kindly accepted an invitation to dine with us to-night. Will you, at least, point out the lady at a distance, if she is there, I, of course, agreeing not to make any advances, nor to ask her name?"

She laid a gentle hand on his arm, and her eyes were sympathetic. "You may be sure I will do all in my power to help you."

He thanked her, and she rose to continue the tramp. She had comforted him so much that he felt almost gay with hope, and was soon engaged in an animated conversation with Doris,

who seemed an emanation of the beauty and harmony of the morning. She had pleased him the night before in spite of the misery of his mysterious quest, and he had enjoyed a sense of being at home with her, which increased with the morning's interchange of ideas. She was even more lovely there in the sunshine, with the fresh color coming and going, and her wonderful eyes alight with the ecstasy of being alive, than in her evening gown at the concert. He could not help but feel that she was most agreeable to look at, stimulating to converse with, and yet restful too, for she had a certain poise of mind unusual in the average girl of twenty. She seemed to have found a center of quietude, and was free from quick, nervous motions of the hands, that mean nothing, although sometimes using a gesture that was really expressive of her thought. The little party returned in time for a late luncheon, which they took together.

"Mrs. Gilbert," said Robert during the meal, "if your niece does not sing it must be because she has never developed the gift, for the longer I am with her the more forcible becomes the impression that she was intended for a singer. She is full of music."

"You must hear her play," replied Mrs. Gilbert.

"But when?" inquired Robert.

"When will you play for us, Doris?" repeated her aunt.

"Between tea and supper," she answered, pleasantly, without demur.

"Can you come to our little salon?" said Mrs. Gilbert to the two men. "It is almost too small for the music to have the most pleasing effect, but we can do no better here."

"There is no concert to-night at our hotel," said Dr. Allston, "and I am sure the manager will allow us to have the hall to ourselves at six o'clock. Will that please you, Miss Avery?"

"Thank you, I will be glad to have the sense of space, of freedom. The violin seems to feel like a captive in a small room."

"The violin!" cried Robert, leaning forward impulsively. "Do you mean to say, Miss Avery, that you play the violin?"

"I am not an artist," said Doris, flushing, "but I love the instrument, and I am sure it loves me. It is human, you know."

"'Fly swiftly round, O wheels of time!'" exclaimed Robert, looking at his watch. "Next to the human voice I love a violin."

"Well, we must go now and rest after our climb," said Mrs. Gilbert, rising. "We will be ready about five-thirty."

"You may expect us to a fraction of a second," said Dr. Allston, eagerly.

"To think she plays the violin!" mused Robert aloud as he turned from the door of the pension, after bidding the ladies good-afternoon.

"And why is it that one is somehow quite sure that she plays it well?" queried his father. The doctor's face was singularly luminous, but Robert was too absorbed in his thoughts to notice it, and their subject was not the mysterious lady of the oratorio, but of the very happy morning on the mountain.

Dr. Allston had no difficulty in arranging for the use of the Konzertsaal, and at six o'clock Doris, attired in a soft blue gown with long graceful lines, stood in the middle of the stage, holding her treasured violin as if it were a beloved child. A beam from the sinking sun touched her, glinting in the reddish-brown coils of her abundant hair, and lighting her slim white fingers as she tuned the instrument.

More than half way down the hall sat Dr. Allston and Mrs. Gilbert. Robert had gone up into a remote corner of the little gallery. Doris played from memory, first a difficult and brilliant concerto. Not a sound broke the silence when she had finished the selection, but the great room was vibrant with something more precious than applause, a response from the hearts of her little audience that reached her and inspired her. Then she played Mrs. Gilbert's favorite Scotch airs,

in which the intensely human note blends with sound of wind and wave and the scent of heather. The room was growing dim, but no one stirred to switch on the electric light.

The dusk softly enveloped the figure of the performer. Now they were in Venice on the Grand Canal, the dark waters lapping the ancient marble steps of palaces, and the music of the barcarolle from Hoffmann's Tales, full of infinite yearning and heartbreak pulsed with magical rhythm in the blood of the invisible auditors.

Once more she played, and this time an interpretation of "Vital spark of heavenly flame." And now, the spirit of the violin seemed to unite with her spirit, as if both were disembodied, mounting aloft, set free from fingers and bow and strings.

Heaven opens on my eyes, my ears with sounds
seraphic ring.

Lend, lend, your wings, I mount, I fly.

O Grave, where is thy victory? O Death, where
is thy sting?

Up, up, up, higher, fainter, sweeter, the last, trembling, far-away note came floating down like a whisper. No one moved or spoke. Doris, herself, stood quite still. Then Dr. Allston walked quietly back down the aisle to the locked entrance, struck a match, found the switch, and turned on a group of side-lights. Mrs. Gilbert's stately

head was bowed on one hand. Robert was not in evidence. Doris turned to lay her violin in its case, and Dr. Allston returned to Mrs. Gilbert, speaking softly to her as she lifted a tear-drenched face. Then he went forward to the stage, took the violin case from Doris and assisted her down the steps.

"You have given me one of the best hours of my life," he said, gently.

"It has been that to me," she replied, turning a transfigured face up to his.

"Ah, there comes Robert," said the doctor, as they saw him rise from the corner of the gallery and go out through the door to the stairs.

Poor Robert had entered into a labyrinth of perplexity and introspection. During the playing of Doris he had been unable to disentangle her personality from that of the singer in the Lucas-kirche. He was indignant with himself that the Violin should have made the same appeal to his whole being as the Voice had done. He had sworn fealty to his search, had felt in his profoundest depths that he had heard the one woman in the world whom he could love always through all the commonplaces of life, and now he scored himself with contempt that within a fortnight he had been moved so deeply by another. He masked the tumult in his mind by an unusually

cool and reserved exterior; and although he thanked Doris courteously, and spoke with keen appreciation of her command over the instrument, he found it easier to walk into the supper room with her aunt, and to address the bulk of his conversation to that lady. But he had nearly forgotten the question that had burned on his lips that morning on the mountain. Suddenly he was conscious of a desire to put Mrs. Gilbert's promise of assistance to the test in order that he might possibly be disillusioned and freed from the bondage that was becoming irksome through suspense.

He leaned forward, and said in a low tone, "Mrs. Gilbert, is she here?"

Mrs. Gilbert turned and looked over her shoulder at the crowd who were chatting and laughing around the small tables. "I do not see her," she said.

After supper it was evident that the doctor wished to have a tête-à-tête with Mrs. Gilbert, and Robert walked up and down the broad corridor with Doris. But there was a strange constraint between them, and they were each relieved when the word was passed around that an impromptu concert would be held in the hall, as several visiting artists had consented to play and sing. A number of people had come in from other hotels, and once more Robert approached

Mrs. Gilbert and inquired again, "Do you see anything of the lady?"

She flushed and looked in every direction but the one where Doris was standing, conversing with a celebrated painter from Berlin. "Robert," she said, after moving her head in the negative, "may I advise you to give up this chase? Ask Doris what she thinks of it."

And he did, sitting beside her in the last row in the gallery, while the first singer and her fussy little accompanist were conferring at the piano over a pile of sheet music.

Angry with himself for what he thought were an unstable mind and fickle heart, resolutely smothering the surging emotion that swept through him at his nearness to Doris, forbearing to let his eyes meet hers, miserably yet blissfully conscious that the end of her gauzy scarf lay across his knee, he decided to make a clean breast of his difficulty, for Doris was so congenial that he knew she would be sympathetic in a sane and helpful way.

"Both your aunt and yourself must be aware of my unusual eagerness to meet the singer I have mentioned several times, and probably you have divined that my interest was something far more than ordinary curiosity or admiration of a beautiful voice. I had almost settled down to a single life when I heard it, but I felt at the time, there

in the Lucaskirche, that the voice was that of my twin-soul appealing to all there is in me of chivalry, poetry, noble ambition, and unswerving devotion. I set out immediately to find the owner of that voice, but so far in vain. It has been impossible for me to concentrate on my work at the University, or to find forgetfulness in books, music, or sleep. I came here with the hope of gaining the object of my quest, but she is still veiled in mystery. Coming down the mountain with you this morning, a strange calm came over my restless spirit. When I left you at your door after our dinner together, I suddenly realized that for a little I had forgotten my Dream Lady, and was furious with myself that I could be capable of happiness short of discovering her. To-night while you were playing, and I sat just here alone, your violin became that Voice, and I experienced anew the very same consciousness of a perfect response from my entire being. Imagine, if you can, Miss Avery, the maddening position in which I am placed. Even while your playing was bearing me up to the seventh heaven, I felt an insane desire to rush to the platform, wrest the instrument from your clasp, and dash it into pieces. What right had you to play like that?"

His tone was almost fierce. "What have you to say about it? Do you wonder that I despise

myself, thinking myself granite, and finding myself water?"

"I would not say that you are either weak or changeable," replied Doris, quietly, looking at him with clear, steady eyes, although her heart was beating to an unaccustomed tempo, and if Robert had trusted himself to give her more than one swift, nervous glance, he would have observed her heightened color. "I would say that your nature is attuned to a certain vibration, and it happened that the voice of the singer and the strings of my violin each produced that vibration and so affected you in the same way."

Robert shook his head doubtfully. "You forget," he replied, "that the vocal cords, and the strings of the violin were each only the instrument by which a woman's soul found expression. Could any two women be so exactly alike in temperament, or in power of interpretation?"

Her eyes fell. She was battling to subdue a nervous trembling that threatened her outward calm. "Mr. Allston," she said, with an effort, after a moment's silence, "may I tell you something that has helped me through many a trial and perplexity?"

He ventured to look at her now that her lids were downcast. She had seemed to him to be bathed in a soft glory as she had stood on the

platform with her violin under her chin, and the light still lingered.

"Please go on," he said, eagerly.

"Simply this," she answered, "that one can be absolutely sure of having a place in the thought of God that belongs to no one else in the universe, and that nothing can keep from us what really belongs to us. John Burroughs has expressed this thought in his famous line, 'My own shall come to me.' Do not blame yourself in this matter, but simply know that you and your affairs are being taken care of. You will find your singer."

He was looking at her now so intently that he drew a glance from her, surprising a strange tenderness in her deep gray eyes. "I will find her?" he queried, musingly. "I am not sure that I want to!"

CHAPTER XV

THE "ODE TO JOY"

THE next morning Robert Allston went back to his work, but his father chose to remain in Bozen and to accompany the ladies on their return the last of the week. Even in the midst of his absorption in his own perplexing affairs, Robert could but notice as he stepped into the railway compartment that he had never seen the doctor look so well nor step with so buoyant a tread. Robert's thoughts were like sheep having no shepherd. He was almost irresistibly attracted to Doris, was conscious of the response of her spirit to his, and yet he felt pledged to the quest of the unknown singer. His sincerest efforts to find her had failed, but he might yet overcome the obstacles that seemed to intervene, and as Doris had said, what was really his could not be ultimately kept from him. With this he drew a notebook from his pocket and endeavored to concentrate on the professor's last lecture on the "Housing of the Poor."

Arrived in Munich, his first errand was to a bookshop, where he ordered a number of new

magazines sent to Mrs. Gilbert, unwilling to confess to himself that the pleasure of that worthy lady was not his ulterior motive.

After a few days had passed he began to realize that he was looking forward to the coming of Doris, and that his zeal for discovering the lady of the oratorio had become considerably modified. This hurt his pride in himself somewhat, but at the same time brought a sense of relief to his mind.

On Saturday he went to the railway station to meet the little party. Dr. Allston alighted radiant, as if reflecting some mysterious brightness unseen by the crowd, and as he handed out Mrs. Gilbert, she turned on Robert a face so illuminated by happiness that it seemed as if twenty birthdays had been obliterated from her list of years.

The eyes of Doris were dancing with suppressed good news, but Robert, as he took her outstretched hand in greeting, only realized the atmosphere of general well-being about the trio, and said, heartily, "Surely, the mountain air has agreed wonderfully with you all."

Mrs. Gilbert looked over her shoulder at him and said, mischievously, "She came down on the train with us!"

"Who?" asked Robert, with such genuine failure to grasp the meaning of the statement, that

Mrs. Gilbert and the doctor exchanged a look of gratified surprise, which was fortunately lost upon Robert. "Ah—yes?" he went on, tardily, his face turning scarlet. "I am so glad to see you all back again that I can think of nothing else at this juncture. However, I'll see to the automobile, father."

As the ladies reached their hotel Mrs. Gilbert said, "There are yet two hours to supper. Will you not both take it in our living room with us?"

"Robert may have another engagement," replied the Doctor, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes, "but I am quite at liberty."

"And I, also," added Robert, hastily.

As they were about to step into the lift to go to their rooms, Robert said, "I think I will run around to the florist's, dad, and order some roses for Miss Avery."

"Wait a minute, Bob," said his father, drawing his purse from his pocket, and taking out his card. "Suppose you add a big bunch of violets, done up in good shape. Don't they tie them with ribbons the same color—long ends, you know, and all that?"

Robert's heart almost stood still. Could it be that his father was in love with Doris? Stranger things than that had happened. His father was a fine-looking man with a commanding bearing,

a delightful talker, and really much younger than his actual years. It was only an instant, but quite long enough for the knowledge to flash through Robert's soul that he loved her himself beyond a doubt. His dream had already vanished in the dawning of this new day. Now the sun rose, and he could see clearly. What terrible complication was this! No wonder his father had grown younger and happier, and had taken even extra pains with his personal appearance. Robert recalled the times that he had seen the two talking animatedly together, apparently on the best of terms. The elevator had already disappeared, and he turned and walked slowly out to the street, facing, as he thought, a great renunciation. His father had given up his life to get him started on the right track, and now that this joy had come to renew the faded hues of life's picture, Robert must resolutely put his own happiness under foot. He would never engage in the lists against the Doctor. He entered the flower shop, inspected the most beautiful and costly blossoms, and having made his selections, asked for two small envelopes to inclose the cards. He was about to write the name of Miss Avery on the second card, when with a thrill of uncertainty, he suddenly bethought himself that his father had not definitely said that the violets were for Doris. He asked permission to use the tele-

phone, and in a moment heard his father's voice at the receiver in their own apartment.

"Dad," said Robert, "you didn't tell me what name to write on the envelope."

"Don't be an ass, Bob! Do you want to know also the width of the Atlantic Ocean, or the capital of Massachusetts?"

"But, dad, I really don't recall her initials."

"W. L.," replied his father—"Mrs. Waverley Lynton Gilbert, of course. Who else could it be?"

"Good-by!" shouted Robert.

That evening Doris had a surprise. There was some little delay in serving the supper, and Mrs. Gilbert asked Robert to sing. He made no excuse whatever, but went to the piano, struck a few chords with an accustomed hand, and began to pour out a rich baritone in the strains of "Annie Laurie."

"Pardon the trite selection," he said, "but dad was whistling the air while he was dressing. I've not heard him whistle for years until to-night."

Robert spoke lightly, but he had sung the dear old love-song with a pathos and tenderness that had astonished them all.

"You seem to be in practice," said Doris. "It must be you sing a great deal."

"Not nearly as much as I would if there were some one to play my accompaniments. I enjoy singing so much more if I can stand."



A new world had opened to these two.

"Will you kindly look over the music on the piano and see if there may not be a few of your favorite songs?" asked Doris. "Not in the sheet music, of course, but there are several bound volumes that contain songs in your register."

"But tell me, please," said Robert, surprised at the quantity of music for the voice that was right at hand, "how is it you have so much vocal music here when you never sing yourself?"

"I am passionately fond of singing," replied Doris, "and by playing the accompaniments to the songs I love, and humming the airs, I get a great deal of pleasure."

"Ah, here is the 'Evening Star,'" exclaimed Robert. "Shall we have a try at it?"

Doris took his place on the piano stool, and began the exquisite introduction. Each was transported in spirit to the lonely road on the mountainside, and Robert was the noble-spirited, hopeless lover, and Doris was Elizabeth kneeling at the shrine. A new world had opened to these two, an endless perspective of happy hours. No one had ever played for Robert so agreeable an accompaniment, adapting itself perfectly to his mood, sustaining, completing, inspiring his voice; and Doris had never taken such delight in this difficult and self-effacing art.

"You will regret that I ever discovered

your talent, Miss Avery," said Robert as he finished.

"I only regret that we must stop to eat," replied Doris as the waiters appeared with the supper trays.

Robert had fully realized that afternoon that his problem was solved, so far as he was concerned, and now the last vestige of disappointment about the singer disappeared in the pleasure he had taken in his own power to express himself by means of the sympathetic playing of his companion.

During the cheery meal that followed, Dr. Allston and Mrs. Gilbert announced their engagement. The episode in the telephone booth had prepared Robert for the news, as well as a reflection he had happened to see in the large mirror during his solo.

"Dad," he said, "I fear this will go to my head. Is this sort of thing contagious?"

"I hope so," said Dr. Allston, "if it can bring you a like revelation. We are like those who find late in the autumn, among the dead leaves of the forest, a cluster of violets in full bloom. This may upset our plans somewhat, Robert. Alice and I are eager to get back to the Ridge."

"And open up the old house?" queried Robert.

"Certainly not, Robert," answered Mrs. Gilbert with a smile. "Your father has promised

not to take me away from my old home; but we have alterations to make before winter. Of course you are always more than welcome to stay with us."

"Thank you kindly," replied Robert, "but I have really set my heart on settling down in the Manor this fall. Dad, you are a deserter! When does this wedding come off?"

"Two weeks from to-day," answered his father, promptly.

"Tom, I have never said so!" remonstrated the bride-elect."

"But I have," replied the Doctor.

"I received a letter from dear old Miss Graves to-day," said Doris. "Did you know her, Dr. Allston, and her funny little on-the-stairs post office?"

"I have seen her handing out mail through that small window below the fan-light," he answered, "but I did not make her acquaintance."

"She is a darling," said Doris, "and one of my best friends. She has written all the news and it makes me feel that I, too, want to go back soon."

The Allstons had heard the story of Doris at Deepfurrow Farm from Mrs. Gilbert.

"Has anything bad enough happened to the Wildes?" inquired Robert savagely.

"O I did not want anything to happen to them," said Doris, reproachfully. "They make

for themselves a lot of unhappiness. But Miss Graves writes that Mr. Wilde is dead. He put a red apple in my Christmas stocking. Now his wife carries on the business."

"She's quite equal to it," interpolated Mrs. Gilbert.

"And Aurelia was sent to a fashionable boarding school," went on Doris, "and eloped with a clerk in a grocery store. Mrs. Wilde was nearly crazy with the shock of it, but finally took them home to the farm, and he is head man and doing very well."

"But why do you wish to return?" asked the Doctor.

"I want to go to see Grandma Lane," said Doris, her eyes filling with tears. "She is often asking for me. She says, 'I want to see Doris before I die. I want to hear her'"—here Doris paused suddenly in confusion. She had almost betrayed her precious secret—"her voice once more," she went on. "You see, Grandma and I were great chums, and had long talks at bedtime."

"Well, I foresee no walking trip this year," said Robert, "except to the steamship company's office."

"But we have that one climb at Bozen to remember always," said Doris. "It was like the glory of a thousand days all condensed into one morning."

"Bob," said his father on the way to their rooms that night, "what would you say to a double wedding? You and I have been comrades a long time."

"Grand idea!" said Robert, grimly. "You seem to know all right how I feel, but, unfortunately, you cannot tell anything about Doris."

"Indeed I can!" replied the Doctor with energy. "You two were made for each other. You know it. Would you credit her with less intuition than you? Go ahead, my boy!"

"You're a dear old fellow!" exclaimed Robert, slapping his father on the back. "I'll do it!"

So the wooing of Doris proceeded, and with such a mingling of tact, fervor, caution, delicacy, and daring on Robert's part, and with so half-hearted a defense by Doris, that the siege lasted only ten days.

There are certain simple, direct words, older than the oldest temple on the Nile, which Robert finally spoke—"Doris, I love you!"

"But, Robert," she said, earnestly, "are you altogether sure that there is no lingering wish in the very last little nook in your heart—no wish for the singer who charmed you so? Is there no hint of regret that you could not find her? No longing to hear her voice again? No real pain to you in the fact that you cannot expect me to sing for you?"

"Doris, darling, you yourself are a song. I want no one but you, now and always."

A few days later in the little American church there were two wedding ceremonies so quietly performed that none of the people in the adjoining library, absorbed in magazines and papers, knew what was going on. The rector's wife and the librarian were the only witnesses with the exception of the Angel Gabriel and the lovely Madonna in the rich memorial window above the altar. Some of the readers glanced up as the two striking-looking couples passed through the library to the front entrance. One curious lady approached the rector saying, "Please, Dr. Jennings, who were those people? They seemed like a wedding party."

"They haven't been long married, I believe," he answered, gravely.

The Allstons had not planned to leave Munich the beloved for their wedding journeys. Why should they mingle their blessedness with the dust and grime of a railway tour? Neither did an automobile trip appeal to them. No; it happened that on that very night, Löwe of Vienna was to conduct Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the Tonhalle, and they agreed to go together, and sit on the brink of that ocean of joy, and let its waves roll over their spirits on this night of all nights.

"It seems to me that my heart will break with happiness," whispered Doris to her aunt as they sat at an early supper in a private dining salon of a popular hotel where they were not known. "The House of Love is more wonderful than ever."

"Dear," said the Doctor's wife, "the Symphony will relieve the tension of your spirit. It will let out of prison for us all to-night the bliss and gratitude that we ourselves could never utter."

To hear the Ninth Symphony which Beethoven wedded forever to Schiller's "Ode to Joy" is at any time an ascent into the heavenlies. To hear it as these four heard it at the close of years of loneliness, years that had brought darkness and isolation to Mrs. Gilbert, and heart-hunger to them all, was to leave this earth for a season and float on a sea of pure, celestial light.

"My thought always goes back to the account of the first performance of this Symphony," said Dr. Allston as they took their seats in the balcony before the beginning of the performance. "Could anything have been more pathetic than the figure of the composer, unseeing, unhearing, in the presence of that great audience beside themselves with enthusiasm! They stood and waved handkerchiefs, shouted, wept, clapped, and poor Beethoven sat with his head bowed on his breast in darkness and melancholy, until one of the

singers impelled him to rise and face the audience. Then the waves of applause, the spirit of appreciation reached his sensitive spirit, and, subsequently, the shock of his success almost ended his life."

"How it proves the reality of the spiritual world that this majestic work was written by one who was shut away from all earthly sounds," said Mrs. Gilbert, musingly.

"The written notes seem to me," replied Doris, "just the physical bodies of the tones. Is it not strange that one black dot can stand for such sweetness or pain, fear, anger, peace, love, or praise?"

The orchestra now entered, and the great tone-drama of the evolution of a soul began with those tentative, pianissimo measures that seem to be groping their way through a mist of uncertainty toward the light. The first movement seems to depict the struggle with doubt and toil and pain, the failure to understand why we exist, and why we suffer, and mingled with it all a yet deeper, darker strain of despair.

The second movement presents the joys of earth to which the half-developed soul turns to satiate its thirst. The light whirl of pleasure, the delights of love, the beauty of nature, are all portrayed in appealing and exhilarating cadences.

In the first part of the third movement the soul

begins to realize its birthright, its oneness with Divine Love, and to rise to serener heights. This was played with such exquisite feeling, with such a smooth, singing quality that Löwe, the great director, who held every instrument in that orchestra under the control of his slender baton, turned slightly and smiled at his first violin, out of the fullness of his own joy in the rendering. But even here, the old mystery and melancholy again make themselves felt, and there is another conflict with the powers of darkness, and then the soul strengthened by its pain, divested of its illusions, purified through its suffering, soars upward into the freedom of its union with all good, truth, and beauty, and finds the joy of the universe. Then the great chorus of three hundred voices bursts forth in rapture with Schiller's words, the instruments almost beside themselves with ecstasy. Self is now lost sight of. The joy of one is the joy of all.

The Allstons made their way slowly out with the crowd. "What music for our wedding day," said Robert to Doris, in a tone too low for any other ear to hear, as he held close the arm he had drawn through his own. "Just look at dear old dad! Isn't his face an 'Ode of Joy'?"

"And Aunt Alice's, too!" answered Doris, softly. "But, Robert, you ought to see yourself."

"Dear, it is reflected light—you are radiant!"

If there weren't so many people around I would kiss you—I've a mind to, anyhow!"

"O Robert, the Doctor is putting Aunt Alice in a taxi. Let's hurry. Why, they're not waiting for us—they're off!"

Robert smiled at the blank dismay on the face of his bride, and he said, as he hailed another taxi, "Doris, they don't want us. Do you care very much?"

"You know I don't."

He gathered her close to his side in the gloom of the automobile and kissed her.

"Robert, dear, please tell me one thing," she said, earnestly. "I'll never ask you again. Did you think of that Lucaskirche singer once this evening?"

"Yes, I did," replied Robert frankly, "for I shall never hear an alto solo without comparing the voice with hers."

"O!" said Doris, sadly.

"But, dearest of girls, can you guess what else I thought at the same time?"

"No, Robert, let me know the worst."

"Well, I thought how thankful I am that I did not find her!"

The last of July saw the little party homeward bound. The marriage of Dr. Allston and Mrs. Gilbert had been the chief topic of conversation at the Ridge and the adjoining country for sev-

eral weeks. Robert's marriage had been kept a secret. They arrived one Saturday night, and all went to Mrs. Gilbert's home. On Sunday morning the little church was packed to overflowing, and before the time for the services to begin all eyes were turned toward the Manor House pew, and many low-voiced comments made a soft murmur all over the auditorium. Mrs. Wilde and Aurelia, who rarely were present, now occupied their old places. They had come especially to see Doris, who had been expected to accompany her aunt home, and their hearts were filled with the wormwood of envy. They expected to see a tall, refined-looking young woman. They knew she had enjoyed superior advantages and had profited by them, but they nor any one else did not dream that Doris was coming home as a bride and the mistress of their old Manor House. So the eyes that at first were fixed in eager curiosity on the Doctor and his wife were speedily more intensely interested in the young couple who followed them down the aisle. Could it be possible that the beautiful girl in exquisite filmy white was Doris Avery, who used to blacken Mrs. Wilde's stove and wash her saucepans and kettles? But what was that! Every native or adopted resident of Waverley Ridge or the Corners knew by sight Lady Margaret's wonderful pearl brooch. By a sort of unwritten law it had always been worn

at her first appearing by a Waverley bride, and never again. It was always kept in a safe in the vestry wall with the communion silver. Robert had determined that Doris should wear the heirloom that morning, and had made an early trip to the rectory with the result that the valuable gems in their ancient setting nestled amid the laces at the throat of his dear lady, silently conveying the tidings that he had made his choice.

Wonder, love, and gratitude filled the heart of Doris as she knelt in prayer between her aunt and her husband, and realized what those two had brought into her life. She went back in thought to that far-away morning when she sat in the Wildes' unfriendly pew. She recalled the old coat, tight in the arm-holes, and the stiff hat and coarse gloves. She remembered the nudge and the frown with which Mrs. Wilde stopped her singing. But even then she was in the House of Love, and because she had known it, nothing could keep her from her own, and with her praise mingled the prayer that her life and Robert's might bring to many hearts the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

After the services both couples were besieged by friendly greetings and congratulations. The Meldens were there among the first to press for-

ward. "Well, how's the voice?" asked Mr. Melden. "We can hardly wait to hear you sing."

"What is all this?" questioned Robert. "Doris doesn't sing a note."

Just then Miss Graves intervened, grasping Doris with both hands, kissing her on the cheek, and talking so volubly that Robert's attention was diverted. Mrs. Wilde stood stonily in her pew looking on, and Aurelia, whose childish beauty had vanished in the peevish and discontented expression habitual to her, said, "Come along, ma. Don't give her the satisfaction of staring at her in all her glory."

"I'll stand right here until she comes along," replied Abigail. "I wonder if she'll notice us at all."

Doris approached slowly along the rows of eager faces and outstretched hands. When she reached the Wildes she stepped aside, holding out one hand to Mrs. Wilde, and the other to Aurelia. They took them icily. "I was very sorry to learn of Mr. Wilde's death," she said, kindly. "Was he ill long?"

"Only three days," said Abigail. "It was pneumonia. How long you've been married?"

"It was soon after Easter," answered Doris. "And, Aurelia, I hear you are married also. How we have grown up! How is Grandma?"

"Very feeble now," said Mrs. Wilde. "She's

confined to her bed all the time, but her mind's pretty good."

"May I come to see her this afternoon?" asked Doris.

"I'm not saying you shan't. Probably ma will be glad to see you once more."

"Then I'll come right after dinner," said Doris.

A big storeroom on the ground floor back of the parlor had been made into a bedroom for Grandma Lane since she became unable to walk, as it was much easier to take care of here there. Robert drove, himself, in a light buggy, and Doris enjoyed every feature of the landscape, and the old store at the Corners, and the crimson rambler that covered the porch of the post office. She remembered the very last time she walked over the road between the store and the Wildes' house, with that weight of terror concerning the strange man said to be her father. They drew up at the horse-block. "I think I will not go in, dear," said Robert. "It isn't in me to be civil to that ogress."

"But, please, Robert, tie the horse and come in with me. It will mean so much to poor little Grandma to see my husband, and you know her mother and grandmother worked at the Manor and knew the family away back."

Aurelia opened the front door sullenly, and Doris said, "Will you permit Mr. Allston to sit in the parlor at first until I have a little visit with

Grandma? Mrs. Wilde, may I present my husband?"

It was said sweetly and naturally, but if Doris had known it, that moment revenged her for every unkind word and harsh look and heavy task that Mrs. Wilde had ever given her.

She was shown by Aurelia into Grandma's room. The little old lady was propped up on pillows, tears of joy rolling over her wrinkled cheeks. "O, my dear," she exclaimed, feebly, as Doris bent and kissed her, "I've prayed so often to see you once more! I hear you're a grand lady now, but you haven't forgotten Grandma, have you? Do you remember that Christmas morning when you opened your stocking alongside of me in my bed? An' you give me a rubber bottle, an' I used it three winters before it busted, an' Annet Graves give me another. O, Doris, there's jest one thing I want now to sorter smooth me all out to go. I'm clean tuckered out, Doris, an' I want to go, but I want to hear you sing the 'King of Love.' Sit right down there by the bed an' sing it, dearie."

Robert was doing most of the talking in the parlor. There were three doors between that room and the one where Grandma was lying, but they were all wide open as well as the windows, and suddenly Robert stopped short in the midst of a sentence, and his heart throbbed with a swift,

wild, ecstatic, incredible happiness. His hands grasped the arms of the old, high-backed horse-hair chair in which he was sitting, his head reeled. He could not believe his own ears. From the little bedroom floated a voice unworn, full, delicious, magnetic:

"The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his,
And he is mine forever."

It was that Voice that had summoned his whole being in the Bach oratorio, the very same. Again he sat beside his father in the Lucaskirche, again he thrilled in every fiber at the call of that woman's spirit to his own.

"Where streams of living waters flow,
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And, where the verdant pastures grow,
With food celestial feedeth."

Unmindful of Mrs. Wilde and Aurelia, he leaned his head back and closed his eyes. Surely, his cup of blessing was running over!

"And so through all the length of days,
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, let me sing thy praise,
Within thy house forever."

"Dear Grandma," said Doris, after a few mo-

ments of silence, while she watched the ineffable peace that crept over the wan face, "the house of the Lord is the House of Love, and we shall go no more out."

"I'd like to see Anne Waverley's son, Doris," she said.

Doris went to the hall door and called to her husband. She was standing by the bed as he entered the room. He put his arm around her, and extended a cordial hand to the invalid. He could hardly speak.

Grandma looked up at him and smiled, saying, "I knew your mother years before you were born, sir. Let me give you and Doris an old woman's blessing."

They bade her good-by, promising to come again, but said not a word to each other, until they had left the house and were driving down the road.

"Doris," said Robert, his voice quite unsteady with the effect of the tremendous awakening he had just experienced, "so you were my Singer, my Dream Lady, your own sweet rival! Why did you let me struggle along in the dark, haunted and perplexed?"

"Because," replied his wife, laying her cheek against his shoulder, "I wanted to be quite sure that you loved me just for myself, Bob!"

"Well, here's a conundrum, sweetheart:

Granted that a woman is absolutely precious, lovable, adorable—absolutely, mind you!—how can she possibly be any more so?”

“Not if she can sing?” asked Doris, archly.

